

# SPILL

From Page 1

cementing and drilling mud efforts and the installation of key safety devices.

"Time after time, it appears that BP made decisions that increased the risk of a blowout to save the company time or expense. If this is what happened, BP's carelessness and complacency have inflicted a heavy toll on the Gulf, its inhabitants, and the workers on the rig," said Democratic Reps. Henry A. Waxman and Bart Stupak.

The missteps emerged on the same day that President Barack Obama made his fourth visit to the Gulf, where he sought to assure beleaguered residents that the government will "leave the Gulf Coast in better shape than it was before."

Obama's two-day trip to Mississippi, Alabama and Florida represents his latest attempt to persevere through a crisis that has served as an important early test of his presidency. The visit coincides with a national address from the Oval Office on Tuesday night in which he will announce new steps to restore the Gulf Coast ecosystem, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condi-

tion of anonymity so as not to upstage the president's announcements.

"I can't promise folks ... that the oil will be cleaned up overnight. It will not be," Obama said after encouraging workers in hard hats as they hosed off and repaired oil-blocking boom. "It's going to be painful for a lot of folks."

But, he said, "things are going to return to normal."

The breached well has dumped as much as 114 million gallons of oil into the Gulf under the worst-case scenario described by scientists — a rate of more than 2 million a day. BP has collected 5.6 million gallons of oil through its latest containment cap on top of the well, or about 630,000 gallons per day.

But BP believes it will see considerable improvements in the next two weeks. The company said Monday that it could trap a maximum of roughly 2.2 million gallons of oil each day by the end of June as it deploys additional containment efforts, including a system that could start burning off vast quantities as early as Tuesday. That would more than triple the amount of oil it is currently capturing — and be a huge relief for those trying to keep it from hitting the shore.

"It would be a game changer," said Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Mark Boivin, deputy

director for near-shore operations at a command center in Mobile. He works with a team that coordinates the efforts of roughly 80 skimming boats gathering oil off the coast.

Still, BP warned its containment efforts could face problems if hoses or pipes clog and engineers struggle to run the complicated collection system. Early efforts at the bottom of the Gulf failed to capture oil.

Meanwhile, congressional investigators have identified several mistakes by BP in the weeks leading up to the disaster as it fell way behind on drilling the well.

BP started drilling in October, only to have the rig damaged by Hurricane Ida in early November. The company switched to a new rig, the Deepwater Horizon, and resumed drilling on Feb. 6. The rig was 43 days late for its next drilling location by the time it exploded April 20, costing BP at least \$500,000 each day it was overdue, congressional documents show.

As BP found itself in a frantic race against time to get the job done, engineers took several time-saving measures, according to congressional investigators.

In the design of the well, the company apparently chose a riskier option among two possibilities to provide a barrier to the flow of gas in space sur-

rounding steel tubes in the well, documents and internal e-mails show. The decision saved BP \$7 million to \$10 million; the original cost estimate for the well was about \$96 million.

In an e-mail, BP engineer Brian Morel told a fellow employee that the company is likely to make last-minute changes in the well.

"We could be running it in 2-3 days, so need a relative quick response. Sorry for the late notice, this has been nightmare well which has everyone all over the place," Morel wrote.

The e-mail chain culminated with the following message by another worker: "This has been a crazy well for sure."

BP also apparently rejected advice of a subcontractor, Halliburton Inc., in preparing for a cementing job to close up the well. BP rejected Halliburton's recommendation to use 21 "centralizers" to make sure the casing ran down the center of the well bore. Instead, BP used six centralizers.

In an e-mail on April 16, a BP official involved in the decision explained: "It will take 10 hours to install them. I do not like this." Later that day, another official recognized the risks of proceeding with insufficient centralizers but commented: "Who cares, it's done, end of story, will probably be fine."

## Evangelical Group To Sit Out Iowa Governor's Race

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — An influential group of religious conservatives said Monday it would sit out the fall gubernatorial election as promised after candidates it favored lost in last week's Republican primary.

The Iowa Family Policy Center's decision was a blow to Republican Terry Branstad, who had banked on support from religious conservatives in his race against Democratic Gov. Chet Culver. The group said neither major party candidate met its standards.

Danny Carroll, chairman of the Iowa Family Policy Center, said in a statement that Republican officials were pushing conservatives to support Branstad. His group had said earlier it would not support the former governor if he won the primary.

"After nearly a week of calls for blind partisan unity from Republican loyalists, the Iowa Family PAC today reaffirmed their intention to withhold support from either major party candidate for governor in 2010 unless one or both of them illustrates a fundamental transfor-

mation," Carroll said in the statement.

Despite pressure from Republicans, Carroll said, "Our commitment to Biblical principles and the constitutional rule of law is not the result of any political affiliation, nor is it something that changes depending on the names on the ballot."

Religious conservatives are important to most Republicans seeking statewide office because they make up such a large percentage of Iowa's GOP voters.

Polling conducted during the last round of presidential caucuses in 2008 showed that six out of 10 who attended Republican caucuses described themselves as evangelical Christians.

Doubts among conservative Christians have frustrated Branstad, whose campaign noted that during his 16 years as governor, he signed a state law outlawing same-sex marriage. It was that law that the Iowa Supreme Court overturned in 2009.

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