

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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June 24, 2010

The Honorable John Holdren
Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy
725 17th St., NW, Room 5228
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Dr. Holdren:

The national tragedy unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico is impacting the lives of millions in the Gulf Region and has attracted the attention of the entire nation. In the months following the Deepwater Horizon accident, BP, as well as federal, state, and local authorities, have sought to halt the flow of the ruptured wellhead, contain leaking oil and natural gas, prevent oil from reaching nearby shores and wetlands, and mitigate the effects of the spill on the Gulf's ecosystem. These are clearly daunting tasks. Despite the complexity involved, it is the responsibility of BP, along with federal, state, and local governments to meet these challenges. In order to surmount this hurdle, all parties need to know they are receiving the best scientific and technical advice possible – guidance free from political meddling or special interest motivations. Because I feel so strongly that the investigation, amelioration, and remediation of the Deepwater Horizon incident should be guided by unfettered scientific and technical advice, I am deeply concerned with a number of instances that have come to light in the wake of this accident.

On May 24, 2010, BP announced a commitment of up to \$500 million to the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) to study the impact of the Deepwater Horizon incident, and its associated response, on the environment and public health in the Gulf of Mexico. In announcing the funding, BP noted “[i]t is vitally important that research start immediately into the oil and dispersant’s impact, and that the findings are shared fully and openly.”¹ The press release continued by stating that BP would “publish a Request of Proposals, inviting research institutions to participate in an independent peer-review process to register their interest in becoming a GRI Research Center. These centers will be selected by a peer-review process, overseen by GRI’s Advisory Council.” BP added that the Advisory Council’s “governance is independent of BP, and council members may not submit funding proposals to GRI.”²

I applaud the independent peer-reviewed nature in which these important research funds will be administered. BP took important steps to ensure that the money they were providing was free from allegations of manipulation. That is why I was surprised to learn that on June 16, 2010, the Administration outlined guidelines for the disbursement of these research funds. In the fact sheet titled “Claims and Escrow,” the Administration states, “BP has previously committed \$500 million for the ten-year Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative to improve understanding of the impacts of and ways to mitigate

¹ BP Press Release, “Three Gulf Research Institutions to Receive First Round of \$500 Million Funding,” June 15, 2010.

² *Ibid*

oil and gas pollution." The fact sheet continues, "As a part of this initiative, BP will work with governors, and state and local environmental and health authorities to design the long-term monitoring program to assure the environmental and public health of the Gulf Region."³

While I certainly agree that research associated with the GRI would benefit from coordination, I am concerned that the Administration is playing an active role in the disbursement of these funds by dictating guidelines. This appearance of unauthorized federal influence on the allocation of private research funding is troubling. Additionally, if the Administration is in *de facto* control of these funds with little or no oversight, this could potentially create an environment ripe for waste, fraud, abuse and mismanagement. More importantly, by the Administration interfering in the process of administering and issuing these independent funds, I worry that those researchers and institutions desperately seeking funding to evaluate the causes and impacts of the incident as well as the potential solutions will be left waiting hat-in-hand. Press reports have already indicated that money for important fast-tracked research has been held up by this directive.⁴ When a region is in dire need of answers, additional bureaucratic hurdles are the last thing the Administration should be creating.

In order to understand the role the Administration is playing in the disbursement of the funds associated with the GRI, I request your attention to the following questions:

- 1) Has the Administration placed any restrictions or guidelines on how these funds are to be issued?
- 2) Under what authority were restrictions or guidelines placed on the disbursement of private funds?
- 3) What government entity is responsible for managing these funds?

Finally, I request that the Office of Science and Technology Policy provide to the Committee all records, as defined in the attachment, relating to the GRI. Given the time-sensitive nature of the research at hand, these documents should be delivered to room 394 Ford House Office Building by 5 p.m. on Friday July 2, 2010. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Mr. Tom Hammond, Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Minority Staff, at (202) 225-6371.

Sincerely,



REP. PAUL BROUN, M.D.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations
And Oversight

cc: REP. BRAD MILLER
Chairman
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

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³ White House Press Release, "FACT SHEET: Claims and Escrow", June 16, 2010.

⁴ Amanda Mascarelli, "White House stalls oil-slick research," *Nature*, June 21, 2010.

ATTACHMENT

1. The term "records" is to be construed in the broadest sense and shall mean any written or graphic material, however produced or reproduced, of any kind or description, consisting of the original and any non-identical copy (whether different from the original because of notes made on or attached to such copy or otherwise) and drafts and both sides thereof, whether printed or recorded electronically or magnetically or stored in any type of data bank, including, but not limited to, the following: correspondence, memoranda, records, summaries of personal conversations or interviews, minutes or records of meetings or conferences, opinions or reports of consultants, projections, statistical statements, drafts, contracts, agreements, purchase orders, invoices, confirmations, telegraphs, telexes, agendas, books, notes, pamphlets, periodicals, reports, studies, evaluations, opinions, logs, diaries, desk calendars, appointment books, tape recordings, video recordings, e-mails, voice mails, computer tapes, or other computer stored matter, magnetic tapes, microfilm, microfiche, punch cards, all other records kept by electronic, photographic, or mechanical means, charts, photographs, notebooks, drawings, plans, inter-office communications, intra-office and intra-departmental communications, transcripts, checks and canceled checks, bank statements, ledgers, books, records or statements of accounts, and papers and things similar to any of the foregoing, however denominated.
2. The terms "relating," "relate," or "regarding" as to any given subject means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, identifies, deals with, or is in any manner whatsoever pertinent to that subject, including but not limited to records concerning the preparation of other records.