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September 9, 2010

TO: Members of the Gulf Coast and Atlantic States Regional Task Force

FR: Senator David Baria, Mississippi
Presiding Officer, Gulf Coast and Atlantic States Regional Task Force

RE: Report of Activities of the Gulf Coast and Atlantic States Regional Task Force at the 64th Annual Meeting of the Southern Legislative Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, July 31 - August 4, 2010

The Gulf Coast and Atlantic States Regional Task Force convened on Monday, August 2. The following is a synopsis of the presentations made to the Task Force. An attendance list is attached. In addition, accompanying this chair's report you will find a meeting brochure for The Council of State Governments' 2010 National Conference in Providence, Rhode Island, December 3-6.

PROGRAM SESSION, AUGUST 2

I. Saving America's Wetland

Sidney Coffee, Senior Advisor, America's Wetland Foundation,
Louisiana

Background

The seventh largest delta on Earth, America's wetland along Louisiana's coast is one of the largest and most productive expanses of coastal wetlands in North America. This delta is on the verge of collapse from decades-long environmental neglect and coastal erosion that has been greatly accelerated by recent natural and man-made disasters.

Ms. Coffee's Presentation

Ms. Coffee began her presentation by providing some background on the past activities regarding coastal policy in Louisiana. Under Governor Mike Foster, Jr., the Committee on the Future of Coastal Louisiana was established. One of the Committee's major recommendations was to raise the awareness of land loss and its devastating effect on not just Louisiana, but the entire nation.

Annually, there is a loss of approximately 24 square miles of coastline in the region, and two days following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, 218 miles of coastline were lost. As a result of the United States Army Corps of Engineers leveeing the Mississippi River, the wetlands were cut off from their natural source, further depriving the area of the natural overflow of freshwater, sediment and nutrients that flow from the middle of the country. According to Ms. Coffee, Louisiana is working to minimize the damage in the wetlands

region, however, the issue affects more than just the state or the region, but the entire country as well.

Following Hurricane Katrina, it was clear that coastal states have to combine coastal protection and coastal restoration efforts as a unit. Furthermore, each state needs one central authority to oversee the coordination of protection and recovery efforts. In response to this need, Louisiana created the Coastal Protection Restoration Authority, which has been successful in coordination of coastal protection and recovery efforts at the state level; however, the Authority still struggles with conflicting federal policies.

The size of the restoration projects in the region is massive because of the rate at which the wetlands are being compromised, leaving little time for the 30 years it takes for an average large-scale project to be completed from start to finish.

The White House Council of Environmental Policy, which has called for an interagency working group of all the federal agencies that are involved in Mississippi's and Louisiana's coastal issues to convene and coordinate efforts, is encouraging and a step in the right direction

Ms. Coffee also highlighted the expansion of the America's Wetland Foundation to create America's Energy Coast, which comprises Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The initiative provides a forum for the four oil and gas producing states along the Gulf of Mexico to work together toward the development of comprehensive solutions to sustain this vital economic region and the environment on which it depends. This is a diverse group with representation from the oil and gas industry, fisheries, navigation, environmental defense, wildlife, and climate change groups.

With regard to the Deep Horizon Oil Spill, Ms. Coffee stated that America's Energy Coast is working on developing a more secure Gulf and, in fact, the group recently met with Secretary Ray Mabus of the United States Navy, head of the Gulf recovery efforts, to discuss measures to safeguard the Gulf against future disasters.

In closing, Ms. Coffee stated that America's WETLAND Foundation has called for immediate funding of authorized projects that have been on hold since 2005. Completion of these projects could make a substantial difference in the restoration of the nation's coastlines, wetlands and critical barrier islands and, if this funding is released, it would amount to more than a billion dollars in coastal impact.

II. The Characteristics and the Fate of Oil in the Deep Gulf of Mexico

Dr. Vernon Asper, Professor of Marine Science, University of Southern Mississippi

Background

Oil is not a foreign substance in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico and, while many gaps remain in our understanding, previous studies of the natural seeps of oil and gas have revealed an amazing variety of life forms that are designed to feed on and decompose the oil. The current massive influx of oil nearly a mile below the surface is likely to have long-term impacts on the deep sea environment. However, these impacts could well be far less serious than if the oil were

all at the surface. Long-term studies of this substance and its fate have been initiated and will continue for at least a decade.

Dr. Asper's Presentation

Dr. Asper pointed out that oil in the Gulf of Mexico is a natural substance. It leaks from the sea floor at the rate of approximately two super tankers per year. The one positive caveat about the oil spill in the Gulf is that it occurred in the deep ocean and, therefore, is not a foreign substance in that environment. Instead, it is something that the microbial community knows how to deal with as it relies on the oil and gas seeping from the sea floor for nutrition.

Dr. Asper discussed what he knew about the cause of the Deep Horizon Oil Spill, but clarified that he is not sure the exact cause of the explosion. However, eye-witness accounts indicate that there may have been natural gas flowing into the rig, which ultimately caused the explosion. According to Dr. Asper, when he arrived on-site two weeks after the explosion, he first noticed the smell of an atypical gasoline or motor oil odor, like a mixture of gasoline and acetone. Due to the smell, when on-site, he advises researchers to use a respirator. Other characteristics of the oil spill consist of different forms of oil identified in the ocean including fresh oil, which looks like oil floating on top of the water; emulsified oil, which is a mixture of water and oil and is very thick; oil sheen, which resembles gasoline mixed with water and is very colorful; and tar balls, which are gooey, have a mild odor, and are usually covered with sand, if found on the beach.

According to Dr. Asper, shortly after his research team arrived at the spill site, BP announced plans to inject dispersants into the flow itself, directly into the water column, at which time his team focused their research on the impact of the dispersants. He stated that when his team asked BP and the Environmental Protection Agency why dispersants were being used to clean-up the spill, they received this answer:

“The purpose of using oil dispersants is to remove the spilled oil from the surface of the sea and transfer it to the water column, where it is rapidly diluted below harmful concentrations and degraded.”

Dr. Asper agreed that if oil can be prevented from reaching the surface and kept away from the marsh, then that is a tremendous accomplishment. However, his team was more interested in studying what happens to the oil once the dispersants are put into the water column. According to Dr. Asper, the dispersants are supposed to break down the oil into small droplets so that bacteria can effectively decompose them.

In addition, the team also plans to research the amount of oil that was spilled into the ocean and where it is now. Vessels used for research expeditions come from various sources including the state of Louisiana, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the United States Navy and the National Science Foundation. He confirmed that, to date, every available marine asset in the country is in the Gulf studying the oil spill.

Dr. Asper also discussed the methods of collecting data, which includes studying mud samples to find out if the oil has settled on the ocean floor and the use of a remotely operated vehicle to locate oil floating on the surface. Based on the data collected, oil was found just below the surface in the form of orange, slimy aggregates. Since these aggregates are not visible in coastal waters and are

not trapped by the booms, which were designed to skim oil from the surface, this is especially problematic. The globs also are very similar in appearance to typical organic aggregates that are a food source for several organisms. This may disrupt the ocean's food chain and ultimately harm the animals that live within.

Dr. Asper's research team also discovered a surprisingly high signal indicating oil at 3,000 feet beneath the ocean's surface. These discoveries were announced to the media, the public and NOAA. Initially, most did not believe there could be oil found at that depth, however after several hours of additional research and expensive testing, NOAA was convinced that there were oil plumes lurking in the deep sea.

Some of the other technological resources used to track the oil include high frequency radar used to triangulate the surface flow of water, coastal radar and a recently invented autonomous vehicle that dives thousands of meters into the ocean and collects data. The vehicle surfaces every four hours, uploads the data it has collected, downloads new instructions and goes back under. As of August 1, 2010, the vehicle had made 331 dives and produced a tremendous amount of data.

Dr. Asper noted that his latest activity surrounding the oil spill has been the search for the deep sea oil plumes. Small patches have been located; however, the large plumes seem to have disappeared, which prompted some scientists to think that they were decomposed by bacteria. Dr. Asper speculated that a portion of the plumes had decomposed but was skeptical that such a vast amount of oil would decompose so quickly. It is likely these plumes sunk to the sea floor.

Dr. Asper closed his presentation with some good news regarding the oil spill clean-up efforts. BP has allocated \$500 million to be spent on research over the next 10 years. According to Dr. Asper, BP had the intention of dispersing the money through a nationwide competitive grant process. However, Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi asserted that the problem is on the Gulf Coast and that is where the money should go. Dr. Asper relayed that Governor Barbour believes that the Gulf Coast is where the people understand the problem and have a long-term interest in researching and resolving the issue. According to Dr. Asper, the process is still under negotiation.

III. Special Report: Disaster Medicine and Emergency Response

Dr. Lancer Scott, Assistant Professor and Emergency Medicine Director, Medical University of South Carolina

Background

The next major disaster to strike the Southeast coastal region, including natural, man-made and infectious catastrophes, will significantly affect hospitals and healthcare facilities, which could face hundreds to thousands of patients who simultaneously will require care. Unfortunately, healthcare workers often are unprepared and poorly trained to handle the scope of medical assistance associated with such disasters, posing grave risks to both patients and providers.

With a goal to improving health professional preparedness around the region, a community-based network of hospitals and emergency preparedness training providers that will enhance disaster

response capabilities in our region by giving health professionals hands-on lessons that protect and save patient lives may prove to be the best resource.

Dr. Scott's Presentation

Dr. Scott discussed the types of natural disasters that could affect the region including, but not limited to, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes. He stated that these are not the only types of disasters that can challenge emergency preparedness and gave examples of chemical disasters in Tokyo, Japan, and Graniteville, South Carolina.

According to Dr. Scott, immediately following the sarin gas attacks in Japan in 1995, 5,500 people were harmed and 11 died on the scene. Due to a lack of disaster preparedness training, 27 percent of the medical staff involved were compromised by off-loading chemical exposures and, as a result, were forced to cease operations.

In Graniteville, South Carolina, in 2005, a train car with 46 tons of chlorine jumped the track and spilled its contents, killing eight people at the scene and injuring 600 more. Of the injured, 63 percent self-transported to the nearest emergency room, which was a small rural hospital located in Aiken, South Carolina. The small rural hospital was not prepared to handle that type of disaster situation.

According to Dr. Scott, “you cannot have homeland security without health security.” The first responders, those on the frontline, should be properly trained in disaster response, but many are not. Under the Charleston, South Carolina disaster response network model, emergency preparedness is represented by a three-set Venn diagram, showing how the public, private industries and non-governmental organizations work together and separately in their respective spheres of influence to prepare for and respond to disasters more effectively. The network also serves as the center of health professional training in emergency response for all hospitals in the city.

Many believe hospitals receive millions of dollars from the federal government for emergency preparedness training but, according to Dr. Scott, this is a myth. The majority of funds, if any, under the Department of Homeland Security, do not go to hospitals. From the budget of the Department of Health and Human Services, funds are allocated to hospitals, but a very small amount of those resources are spent on training. Dr. Scott stressed that the predominant concern in disaster medicine should not be beds, medical equipment or medicine, rather the focus should be on appropriate disaster training and surge capability as opposed to surge capacity.

Following the presentations, Senator David Baria thanked Ms. Coffee, Dr. Asper and Dr. Scott for their contributions and opened the floor for questions.

IV. Southern Legislative Conference's Gulf Coast and Atlantic States Regional Task Force Summit

At the request of the Task Force, the group will attempt to convene again in late October in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi for a special fly-in. Additional information and correspondence regarding the Task Force Summit will follow this summary.

V. Southern Legislative Conference 65th Annual Meeting, Memphis, Tennessee

The SLC will meet for the 65th Annual Meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, July 16 - 20, 2011. In keeping with the wishes of the SLC presiding officers, please note that meeting notification does not authorize travel.

SLC Staff Contact

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Ms. Lori Jones-Rucker in the Atlanta office at 404/633-1866 or *ljones-rucker@csg.org*.

ATTENDANCE LIST

Southern Legislative Conference 64th Annual Meeting
Gulf Coast and Atlantic States Regional Task Force
July 31 - August 4, 2010
Charleston, South Carolina

(List reflects those attendees whose names appeared on the sign-in sheet)

ALABAMA

Senator Vivian Davis Figures
Representative Randy Davis

ARKANSAS

Representative Butch Wilkins
Representative-Elect Homer Lenderman

GEORGIA

Representative Al Williams
Lori Jones Rucker, Southern Legislative
Conference
Mikko Lindberg, Southern Legislative
Conference
Brian Sernulka, Alliance to Save Energy
Cynthia Jester, U.S. Department of Defense

KENTUCKY

Representative Tom Burch
Ann Kelly, The Council of State Governments
Mike Robinson, The Council of State
Governments
Stephanie Fullmer, Legislative Research
Commission
Sharon Newman, Legislative Research
Commission

LOUISIANA

Senator Butch Gautreaux
Senator Edwin R. Murray
Sabrina Whitaker, Senate
Debra Russell, Senate
Brittany Desselle, Senate
Sidney Coffee, America's Wetland Foundation

MISSISSIPPI

Senator David Baria
Dr. Vernon Asper, University of Southern
Mississippi

NORTH CAROLINA

John Monaghan, Piedmont Natural Gas
Phillip Morgan, Piedmont Natural Gas

SOUTH CAROLINA

Representative Walt McLeod
Dr. Lancer Scott, Medical University of South
Carolina

TEXAS

Representative Warren Chisum

VIRGINIA

Senator Emmett Hanger

WEST VIRGINIA

Delegate Michael Ferro
Delegate Danny Wells

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Steve Blackistone, National Transportation
Safety Board
Aaron Doppers, Save the Children

CANADA

Member of Parliament Christian Ouellet
Paula Dickerson, Consulate General of Canada in
Raleigh
Anne Mattson Gauss, Embassy of Canada
Tristan Sanregret, Director, Alberta-U.S.
Relations