

Opening Statement – Chair Alan S. Lowenthal
Joint Oversight and Investigations & Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Hearing:
“Southern California Oil Leak: Investigating the Immediate Effects on
Communities, Businesses, and the Environment”
October 18, 2021

[After Chair Porter’s opening statement]

Thank you, Chair Porter, and good morning to everyone joining us in person and online.

And I want to echo Congresswoman Porter’s thanks to Irvine Ranch Water District for their generous hospitality and assistance with this morning’s hearing.

Today, we are learning from the community about the effects of the oil leak that occurred not far from our shores.

The latest evidence collected by federal investigators suggests that the 41-year-old San Pedro Bay pipeline may have been initially damaged by a ship’s anchor months ago.

But that it only started gushing thousands of gallons of crude oil into the ocean a little over two weeks ago, following a more recent accident or event.

While initial estimates of the oil spilled were as high as 144,000 gallons, last week, the Coast Guard reduced their estimate to closer to 25,000 gallons.

This is a welcome relief for the additional wildlife and communities that may have suffered if the leak was as large as it could have been.

But that’s little solace for the shop owners, vendors, fishermen, and other small businesses whose lives were upended in a matter of moments and who are still recovering today.

Furthermore, the thousands of gallons of oil that leaked into the ocean, washed up onto beaches, and inundated coastal wetlands have had – *and will continue to have* – damaging effects on the ecosystems we hold dear.

Southern California's coastline and our surrounding environments are the lifeblood of our communities and our way of life.

And any threat to these resources must be taken seriously and addressed swiftly.

But as Chair Porter emphasized, the exact cause and circumstances surrounding the leak are still under investigation, and it will take time and patience before we all have the facts that we deserve and need.

But one thing is sure. We will get to the bottom of the leak and hold the responsible parties, including Amplify Energy, accountable for their actions.

The California Attorney General has also announced his office is investigating the spill and is coordinating with state, local, and federal authorities.

As part of this process, Congress must hear first-hand from those most affected about what they have seen and what they have experienced.

And that's what today is about – listening and learning.

The witnesses this morning will detail the effects of the spill on businesses and our environment, so we can chart a course forward and prevent future spills from occurring.

But this is not a novel threat to us.

Time and again, Californians have suffered at the hands of offshore drilling.

From Santa Barbara in 1969 to San Francisco Bay in 1988 to Refugio Beach in 2015. And now, to Huntington Beach.

Each of these disasters has had a different direct cause and a different set of circumstances. But each is because we have not broken our dependence on fossil fuels, and we continue to allow drilling off our shores.

Preventing new offshore drilling is a critical first step and one that we are actively working to ensure remains in the Build Back Better Act working its way through Congress.

But we must also work to wind down current production and mandate that companies decommission their old platforms, wells, and pipelines and clean up the mess they leave behind.

As our nation continues its transition to a clean-energy future, the threat to coastal communities and American taxpayers from aging offshore oil and gas infrastructure will only continue to rise.

Last week, my subcommittee held a hearing about the dangers associated with these abandoned structures, and we will continue to investigate the issue further.

If we do not address the root cause of the oil spills that happen over and over, we will simply be navigating from one tragedy to the next.

And the pipeline leak off Huntington Beach was a tragedy, and we continue to see the consequences of it today.

Thank you again, Chair Porter, for your subcommittee leadership and for working to hold the fossil fuel industry accountable for the damage they cause to our communities and the climate.

With that, I look forward to the testimony from our witnesses, and I yield back.