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CAP-Oxfam Remarks**

Thank you John for that kind introduction, it is a pleasure to be here with all of you today. I'd also like to thank the Center for American Progress and Oxfam for organizing this event and for continuing to draw attention to the needs of people in the Gulf.

Last April's Deepwater Horizon oil spill left an indelible impression on all of us – and certainly on those who live in the Gulf Coast. Eleven people were killed and for weeks we watched almost 5 million barrels of oil being released into the Gulf of Mexico. It was one of the worst man-made environmental disasters our country has ever experienced.

The oil spill was a significant threat to the people, economy and ecology of the region. The economies and ways of life in Gulf Coast communities are interwoven with the health of the Gulf ecosystem. Clean and healthy waters, marshes, and beaches mean abundant fisheries, protection from storm surge, and a vibrant tourism economy. And subsistence fishing is a regional safety net, if you can't find work, you can at least catch some seafood to feed your family.

For all of these reasons, the oil spill had a devastating effect on the region, and a response of equal proportion was required. Ultimately, more than 47,000 responders from the federal, state, tribal, local, private and volunteer sectors aggressively and diligently fought the spill.

One of the untold stories of the spill is the resilience and heroism of Gulf Coast Residents – local citizens who became involved from the earliest moments: Captain Alwin Landry and the crew of his offshore supply vessel, *the Damon Bankston*, rescuing the 115 survivors of Deepwater Horizon.

Don Abrams and Melanie Allen -- friends from the Mississippi coast -- launching OilSpillVolunteers.com as the disaster unfolded and, within hours, more than 700 people signing up to protect the region's wetlands, estuaries, and barrier islands.

And the high degree of local engagement continues with all of you who have long championed coastal Louisiana restoration and inclusive economic development, and are still working to keep the Gulf Coast on the national agenda today.

But while it's critical for local communities to take on big challenges, they shouldn't have to do it alone – particularly in a situation like the oil spill. Instead, President Obama and the entire Administration have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the residents of the Gulf Coast and will continue to be an active partner.

Under the leadership of Admirals Allen and Zukunft (“Zoo –cun-ft), the Coast Guard, along with other federal agencies and state and local governments, directed the largest response to an environmental disaster in American history.

- Coast Guard Personnel continue to oversee efforts to combat the oil and minimize its impacts.
- NOAA and FDA continue to test and ensure that the seafood from the Gulf of Mexico is safe.
- The Department of Health and Human Services has fought to ensure the safety of response personnel and monitors health trends in the broader population.
- The Small Business Administration has provided low-cost loans, loan deferments and advice to businesses across the Gulf.
- The Department of Commerce led a multi-agency effort to provide technical assistance and economic planning to 21 counties and parishes across the Gulf Coast.
- The Departments of Homeland Security, Justice and Labor and others worked with the responsible parties to ensure individuals, businesses and local governments had access to claims funds.
- And The White House negotiated with BP to set aside \$20 billion to cover claims.

And in order to ensure that there is a long-term recovery plan, the President named EPA Administrator (and Louisiana Native) Lisa Jackson to lead the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. Comprised of representatives from federal agencies and the five Gulf coast states, this unique intergovernmental partnership is charged with delivering a Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Strategy.

The establishment of this Task Force was called for in the long-term recovery plan developed by Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus. The Mabus Report outlined a broad vision of "resilient, healthy Gulf of Mexico ecosystems that support the diverse economies, communities, and cultures of the region." Lisa Jackson's Task Force will build upon this vision by working together across agencies and offices to help to revitalize the region and build it back better and stronger. I know you heard an update from the Task Force's Executive Director, John Hankinson today.

As we work closely with the people of the Gulf to rebuild their livelihoods and restore the environment that supports them - this Administration is committed to aligning the ecosystem restoration strategy with economic development.

Federal and state agencies are currently investing in economic revitalization activities along the Gulf. Efforts are underway by Federal agencies to explore ways to better coordinate resources and spur innovation in support of Gulf Coast economic recovery.

The Task Force will be holding public listening sessions in each of the Gulf States to make sure citizens have every opportunity to provide meaningful contributions to its work and to share their ideas on how to stimulate their economy. And as these public listening sessions will show us, the people of this region will often have the best ideas. The Task Force will work closely with NOAA and other state and federal trustees as they implement the Natural Resources Damages process. Earlier today, I know you heard from Jane Lubchenco about our progress.

As the Administration worked with Gulf state governors, fishers, business owners, indigenous communities, conservationists, and community leaders to develop a restoration plan, we found that what was needed was a plan that addressed the needs of communities, the ecology and the economy. The environment and economy do not have to be in conflict and in fact, not only is there a way for the region to move forward on these efforts simultaneously, but we must integrate our economic and environmental goals.

To do that, the Administration created an Economic Solutions Team, bringing together a number of White House offices and others to deploy teams of specialists to parishes and counties across the Gulf. These teams consulted with local elected officials, businesses, academics and nonprofits to identify the challenges and opportunities when bringing together local stakeholders to build more diverse and sustainable economies.

Local economic developers have identified that coastal and marine restoration could be a tremendous economic opportunity. Environmental restoration can be a driver of regional restoration and a pathway to opportunity and resilience for coastal communities. Coastal

restoration will create jobs, providing a potential lifeline to struggling businesses and underemployed workers.

The President met a number of business owners when he travelled to the Gulf last summer, Captain Gary Jarvis, was one of them. Gary started fishing as a deckhand back in 1978, and he's been captain for the past three decades, making his living on the water. He's lost nearly half of his business because of the spill, though he was able to use his boat as a vessel of opportunity. And as both a charter fisherman and a commercial fisherman, he's extraordinarily knowledgeable about these waters. For those reasons, Gary had some terrific suggestions about how, working with scientists from NOAA and other federal agencies, we can do even more to make sure that we are monitoring and maintaining and improving the fishing off the coast of Florida and across the Gulf. He inspired others to improve a business that has been functioning the same way for decades.

Those who work in the oil and gas, or shipping and fisheries industries like Gary are actually well prepared to play a part in a restoration economy. We just need to further invest in them to give them the skills they need to do so.

This also is a chance for social innovators along the Gulf -- home to some of our nation's most exciting nonprofits -- to design new programs to maximize the economic impact of the environmental recovery. The involvement of nonprofit organizations and citizen/community groups will be an integral part of the long-term recovery effort in the region. There are many

others -- like Dan and Melanie, from OilSpillVolunteers.com -- who had an innovative idea that helped volunteers participate in the recovery.

The Mabus Report recommended ways to help enhance coordination among these groups, and The Corporation for National and Community Service has been convening groups and providing technical assistance to support and expand their excellent work

And yet, these efforts are not enough. The Clean Water Act includes provisions for the recovery of civil penalties associated with oil spills. Those penalties are calculated based on, among other things, the amount of oil spilled. A key recommendation from the Mabus report is that Congress dedicate a substantial amount of any Clean Water Act civil penalties incurred from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill to the Gulf region's restoration and recovery. The report recommends that the penalties be deposited into a Gulf Coast Recovery Fund, and today, it remains essential for Congress to act. One of the most critical pieces of this long-term plan is the availability of dedicated funds.

Less than a year ago, one of the worst man-made environmental disasters enveloped the Gulf. But because of people like you and the Administration's partnership, today, while the attention of the media and the public is beginning to shift elsewhere, the Gulf Coast is on the road to

recovery. Across the Coast, residents are helping each other, heroes continue their quiet work, and everyone is working to restore ecosystems and recover an economy that is more stable, more inclusive and more diverse than ever before.

President Obama reminds us that during difficult times, our country invests in better research and education, and then unleashes a wave of innovation that creates new industries and millions of jobs. In fact, time and again, he has told us that this is our “Sputnik moment” – and I say that perspective must be alive and well as we do our work in the Gulf.

We have an opportunity to rebuild by sparking innovation and creating pathways out of poverty. We can use this challenge to create jobs, build a stronger economy, help make the low income communities less vulnerable to disasters and create opportunities for everyone to have a chance at the American dream. And we can do this with people like Gary who know their region better than anyone else and are committed to its recovery.

As the President said on June 15, 2010, we will not forget what happened in the Gulf, and we will not forget the promise made to the people of the Gulf. I thank you for your work and look forward to our continued partnership to make that promise a reality.