

Tragically, the blowout preventer failed. At 9:49 p.m., there was an explosion on the rig floor. The Deepwater Horizon rig quickly became an inferno. Eleven men died. Eleven families were changed forever.

As morning came the next day, an oil sheen 2 miles long and a half mile wide shone on the surface of the waters of the gulf as the blaze on the rig continued. Those images are seared into our collective mind's eyes. So the owner of the well, BP, and the owner and operator of the rig, Transocean, tried and failed again to close the blowout preventer that evening. Then days later, on Earth Day, April 22, at 10:22 a.m., the rig on the surface of the gulf sank.

If we can remember, we were first told the sheen that was 2 miles long and a half mile wide came from the drums of diesel onboard the rig. Then later, a revision was made that 1,000 barrels of oil a day were leaking from the well a mile below the surface of the gulf. Then that was changed to 5,000 barrels of oil per day and then to 25,000 barrels of oil a day. But none of those estimates were true. Scientists looking at the sheen from aerial observations started to grow very skeptical about what BP engineers were telling them.

On the environment committee, Chairman BOXER and I started to turn up the public pressure to get BP to turn over live footage of 1 mile below the surface of the gulf, where the oil was escaping. We wanted to see how much oil the cameras were showing was escaping from the well. The spill was not out of mind; it was out of sight. As it turned out, unbelievably, 62,000 barrels of oil a day were gushing into the gulf into what is one of our most productive ecosystems on the planet. But we would never have gotten that had scientists not been able to make their estimates by virtue of the live-streaming video that Senator BOXER and I put up on our Web sites so people—unencumbered, around the globe—could make their estimates. This is a prime example of why we must independently verify what oil companies tell us about a spill.

As we got into the summer, the prime of the summer beach season, especially at our beaches in Florida, that was devastating. Nearly 37 percent of gulf waters were closed to fishing. BP and its contractors had no control of the runaway well. On July 15, in the middle of the summer—87 days after the explosion—BP finally stopped the oil flow.

Today is the anniversary. Our hearts collectively go out to the families that lost the 11 men.

If we don't learn from this experience, shame on us. It will come back to haunt us, and in many ways it already has.

If we start at the bottom of the food chain, there are impacts to the gulf environment. Bull minnows, or killifish—little fish about that size—root around in the sediment of the bays of Louisiana. In those oiled Louisiana

marshes, these little killifish are showing grotesquely deformed gill tissue. And when the killifish embryos were exposed to oil sediment, they showed heart defects, and many failed to hatch.

Two LSU professors told me shortly after they had done the research about a year after the spill that they found that the killifish in their reproductive cycle were mutated. They compared them to the killifish in the bays that did not have the oil come in, and there was a distinct difference between the two.

As we go up the food chain, the top predators face threats from the oil. Scientists have found unusual lung damage, hormone abnormalities, and low blood cell counts up the food chain in dolphins that were exposed to the oil. And we are not going to know the full extent of the impact for years, even decades.

As a matter of fact, somebody said a few months after the BP spill had been contained that there was no more oil in the gulf. There is a lot of oil in the gulf. We just can't see it. It is down there a mile below the surface. And what are the effects on the health, the future health of the gulf? We don't know, but we are going to have to research it.

But even with all we learned back in 2010, to this very day, oil infrastructure in the gulf—this is just unbelievable—operated by the Taylor Energy Company continues to leak crude oil since one of the hurricanes years ago. In 2004, a hurricane caused an underwater mudslide that damaged a cluster of oil wells off of Louisiana. Need I remind the Senate, June 1 is the beginning of hurricane season. So if we are visited by another hurricane, and if it does as it did in 2004, 11 years ago, having a cluster of Taylor wells that got buried in an undersea mudslide from the hurricane—but the wells are still leaking 11 years later—what is going to happen to other oil structures in the gulf if the big one comes?

According to the Associated Press investigation, the actual flow rate of those Taylor wells may be 20 times higher than originally reported. We have seen this episode before. I don't think we want to repeat this.

It is so frightening. I asked the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Secretary of the Interior to provide any and all images of the Taylor spill. The Congress, in our oversight responsibility, has the right to that information. We have to know how much oil is escaping, and then we have to figure out how to stop it from underneath the undersea mudslide that covered up that cluster of wells.

In the coming weeks in the Senate commerce committee we are going to examine what we have learned in 5 years since the Deepwater Horizon explosion. In 2012, our bipartisan RESTORE Act got overwhelming votes in both the House and the Senate. The RESTORE Act is a formula with which

to send the money that ultimately Judge Barbier of the Federal district court in New Orleans will decide as a result of the number of barrels spilled and the culpability of the company. As a result of that, money will flow. It will flow back to the local governments, it will flow back to help the economies of the gulf, and it will flow back in order to try to protect our environment. There is more to be done. I intend to introduce legislation to make sure we prevent, prepare for, and effectively respond to the next oil spill.

As we reflect on the tragic events of April 20, 2010, I hope the Senate will be mindful of this tragedy in the gulf, which riveted the attention of the Nation, that seemed out of control for 3 months, and of which we will have the very infernal consequences for years to come.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Will the Senator withhold his request?

Mr. NELSON. Of course.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### NOMINATION OF GEORGE C. HANKS, JR., TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of George C. Hanks, Jr., of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there is 16 minutes of debate remaining on the nomination.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, do I have 15 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, tonight, the Senate will vote on the nomination of George Hanks to be a district judge for the Southern District of Texas. If confirmed, Judge Hanks will be the President's 309th judicial nominee confirmed since this President took office. By comparison, at the same point in his Presidency, President Bush had only 273 judicial nominees confirmed.

Despite some of the complaints that we are hearing from my colleagues on the other side, we are moving judicial nominees at about the same pace as we did at this point in President Bush's Presidency. One difference, of course, is how the Senate handled the judicial nominees that were reported out of the committee during the lameduck session.

Historically, the Senate doesn't confirm judges at the end of a Congress if those judges are reported out of committee during a lameduck. The reason for this, of course, is so the newly elected Members have an opportunity for their voices to be heard. For instance, that is what happened in 2006 when the Senate returned 13 judicial nominees to the President. Those nominees were then renominated in 2007 and eventually confirmed in the new Congress, but the Senate Democrats did not follow tradition last year. Instead of following standard practice, Senate Democrats confirmed 11 judicial nominees who were reported out of committee during the lameduck session. Had they followed standard practice, we would have voted on those nominees at the beginning of this year, just as the committee did with the nominees that were resubmitted in 2007.

At the end of the day, when we include the 11 district court nominees who were confirmed at the end of last year, we are at about the same pace that the Democratically led Senate was in 2007 during the Bush administration. This is further confirmed when you compare the committee's work this year to 2007. In 2007, at this point in the Congress, the committee had held three nominee hearings for a total of 10 judges.

As of right now, the Judiciary Committee has already held 4 nomination hearings for a total of 10 nominees. These nominees include six judges and four executive nominees, including both the Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General nominees.

The bottom line is the Senate Judiciary Committee is treating the President's nominees extremely fairly. He has had dozens more nominees confirmed than President Bush did at this point in his Presidency. I expect another one will be confirmed tonight, and I congratulate Judge Hanks on his pending nomination and urge my colleagues to vote accordingly.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today, we will be voting to confirm Judge George Hanks, who has been nominated to be a Federal district judge in the Southern District of Texas. Judge Hanks is just the second judicial nominee that we have voted to confirm more than 3 months into the 114th Congress. The slow trickle of confirmations that the new majority has allowed is undermining the functioning of our Federal courts and is hurting the American people. This past month, the Wall Street Journal wrote an alarming article about the backlog of civil cases in our Federal courts. One man interviewed for the article filed a Federal law suit in 2007 and is still waiting for his case to be heard. It is unconscionable that an American would have to wait 8 years and still not have his day in court. Unfortunately, it is not surprising given that at last count, there were more than 330,000 civil cases pending in our Federal courts. This is a

record high and an increase of nearly 20 percent since 2004.

There are steps the Republican majority should take to help our Federal courts better serve the American people. First, the Senate should confirm every single one of the nine judicial nominees on the Executive Calendar without further delay. Besides Judge Hanks, there are two other Federal district court nominees pending on the Executive Calendar, both from States with two Republican home State Senators. Both of those nominees were reported out of the Judiciary Committee unanimously by voice vote. One of the nominees will fill a judicial emergency vacancy in Texas that has remained unfilled for more than 2 years. This type of neglect is unacceptable. In addition, there are five other nominees to the Court of Federal Claims and a nominee for the Court of International Trade. None of these nominees are controversial and they could easily be confirmed by a simple voice vote if Republicans would allow.

After today's confirmation vote, there will be 53 vacancies on our Federal courts. But even if we filled every one of these vacancies, we still would have to address the growing needs of our co-equal branch of government that is struggling with heavy case-loads. Last month, the Judicial Conference of the United States, led by Chief Justice John Roberts, identified the need for adding 73 permanent judgeships, as well as converting 9 temporary district court judgeships to permanent status. The Senate should be working in a bipartisan manner to provide the Federal Judiciary with the resources it needs, including the addition of woefully-needed additional judgeships.

The fact that today we are only voting on the second judicial nominee of this Congress shows that the delay and obstruction that we saw from Republicans in the first 6 years of the Obama administration has continued now that they control the Senate's agenda. One simply needs to look at the nomination of Loretta Lynch to understand how Republicans approach our constitutional role of advice and consent. Ms. Lynch is an eminently qualified nominee and enjoys broad support, yet her nomination has now been pending before the full Senate for 53 days. That is more than twice as long as all of the past seven Attorneys General combined: Richard Thornburgh, 1 day; William Barr, 5 days; Janet Reno, 1 day; John Ashcroft, 2 days, Alberto Gonzales, 8 days; Michael Mukasey, 2 days; and Eric Holder, 5 days. This delay is an embarrassment for the United States Senate. I agree with President Obama, who said last week that "there are times where the dysfunction in the Senate just goes too far." The obstruction of this historic nominee has gone on far too long. It is long past time for the Senate Republican leader to allow Ms. Lynch a vote and allow the American people to be

served by this outstanding public servant.

The judicial nominee we are voting on today, Judge George Hanks, will fill a Federal district court vacancy in the Southern District of Texas. Since 2010, Judge Hanks has served as a U.S. Magistrate Judge for the U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of Texas. Prior to joining the Federal bench, Judge Hanks was a Court of Appeals Justice for the First District of Texas from 2002 to 2010, and a judge on the 157th Civil District Court of Texas from 2001 to 2002. Before becoming a judge, he was in private practice for nearly a decade. The ABA Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary unanimously rated him "Well Qualified," its highest rating. Judge Hanks is supported by his two Republican home State Senators and his nomination was unanimously approved by voice vote by the Judiciary Committee on February 26. He has strong qualifications and should be confirmed without further delay.

I urge the Republican Leader to schedule votes to confirm the remaining judicial nominees pending on the Executive Calendar. None of the nominees are controversial. We should do our jobs and vote on their nominations so that they can start doing their jobs working for the American people.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of George C. Hanks, Jr., of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Texas?

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT), the Senator from Indiana (Mr. COATS), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULLIVAN), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea."

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 91, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 155 Ex.]

YEAS—91

Ayotte	Franken	Nelson
Baldwin	Gardner	Paul
Barrasso	Gillibrand	Perdue
Bennet	Grassley	Peters
Blumenthal	Hatch	Portman
Booker	Heinrich	Reed
Boozman	Heitkamp	Reid
Boxer	Heller	Risch
Brown	Hirono	Roberts
Burr	Hoeven	Rounds
Cantwell	Inhofe	Sanders
Capito	Isakson	Sasse
Cardin	Johnson	Schatz
Carper	Kaine	Schumer
Casey	King	Scott
Cassidy	Kirk	Sessions
Cochran	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Collins	Lankford	Shelby
Coons	Leahy	Stabenow
Corker	Lee	Tester
Cornyn	Manchin	Thune
Cotton	Markey	Tillis
Crapo	McCain	Udall
Daines	McCaskill	Vitter
Donnelly	McConnell	Warner
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Enzi	Merkley	Whitehouse
Ernst	Mikulski	Wicker
Feinstein	Moran	Wyden
Fischer	Murphy	
Flake	Murray	

NOT VOTING—9

Alexander	Cruz	Rubio
Blunt	Graham	Sullivan
Coats	Murkowski	Toomey

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

The Senator from Wyoming.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

CONGRATULATING THE PROVIDENCE COLLEGE MEN'S ICE HOCKEY TEAM FOR WINNING THE 2015 NCAA DIVISION I NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I stand with great pleasure and pride, along with Senator WHITEHOUSE, to congratulate the Providence College men's hockey team in winning the 2015 NCAA Division I National Championship, and I am pleased to have worked with my colleague Senator WHITEHOUSE in adopting a resolution last week to honor this great accomplishment.

This is the first national championship in the history of PC's men's hock-

ey club, and I am sure this season will be long remembered by Providence College players, coaches, staff, and fans.

The championship game featured phenomenal plays and contributions from many Friars players, including a career-high 49 saves by goaltender Jon Gillies, and one goal each from Anthony Florentino, Mark Jankowski, Tom Parisi, and Brandon Tanev.

I would like to congratulate all of the Friars players whose season-long hard work and dedication made this successful season possible. The 2015 PC men's hockey team consisted of: Rhode Island's own Noel Acciari, Mark Adams, Brooks Behling, Alex Cromwell, Logan Day, Stefan Demopoulos, Nick Ellis, Anthony Florentino, Jon Gillies, John Gilmour, Robbie Hennessey, Mark Jankowski, Brendan Leahy, Shane Luke, Conor MacPhee, Ross Mauermann, Kyle McKenzie, Steven McParland, Trevor Mingoia, Josh Monk, Tom Perisi, Brian Pinho, Truman Reed, Kevin Rooney, Niko Rufo, Nick Saracino, Brandon Tanev, and Jake Walman. I will apologize for my Rhode Island accent.

I would also like to extend my best wishes to PC player Drew Brown, who missed this season while battling a rare form of bone cancer and is thankfully now reported to be cancer-free. But he contributed in many ways to the success of the team.

Additionally, I want to recognize the coaches and staff whose commitment and preparation was essential to winning this national championship, especially head coach Nate Leaman, who won the championship in only his fourth season at PC. The other coaches and staff of the 2015 PC men's hockey team were: associate head coach Steve Miller, assistant coach Kris Mayotte, coordinator of Men's Hockey operations Kyle Murphy, and goaltending coach Jim McNiff.

I also commend Providence College President Father Brian Shanley and athletic director Robert Driscoll on their accomplishments and extraordinary dedication to the school and to the community of Rhode Island.

Again, I join many in the State of Rhode Island and around the hockey world in congratulating the Providence College men's ice hockey team on their incredible national championship season and wish them continued success in the future.

I am proud to yield the floor to my colleague Senator WHITEHOUSE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am very pleased and also very proud to follow the senior Senator and my colleague and to join Senator REED in congratulating our Providence College men's ice hockey team on winning its first-ever national championship. The Friars edged out Boston University 4 to 3 a week ago Saturday night in PC's first trip to the Frozen Four in 30 years. The BU-PC event was a southern New England showdown that brought

more than 18,000 hockey fans to Boston's TD Garden. Playing so close to home, PC had plenty of support from the stands. They also had a little bit of good luck, but it was more than luck that put Providence College over the top.

Those kids played their hearts out, and forward Brandon Tanev's go-ahead score in the third period to seal the win was no fluke. The Friars earned that victory, and Rhode Islanders couldn't be more proud of them.

Head coach Nate Leaman said that when it gets to be that late in the season and when there is that kind of championship pressure, "You win," he said, "with guys that are gritty. . . ."

Well, Senator REED and I are excited to join Providence College president Father Brian Shanley and the entire PC community in celebrating this historic win. Congratulations to Coach Leaman and his staff, to goalie Jon Gillies, who was named Frozen Four Most Outstanding Player, and to all the PC players who fought so hard all season to this wonderful result.

As junior forward Noel Acciari, a native of Johnston, RI, put it, "We might be a small State, but we're hard workers."

Well done, Friars. You are, indeed, hard workers and your hard work paid off.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INSPECTORS GENERAL

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the ability of Congress to be a check on the actions of the executive branch is being endangered. One of the tools that we in Congress have created to help the government identify and correct its mistakes is being obstructed. That tool is the vital work of inspectors general.

Inspectors general work in nearly 80 Federal agencies. They perform audits, conduct investigations, and issue public reports of their findings and recommendations. They combat waste, fraud, and abuse. Their work is being frustrated, and that is why I am here. To keep an eye on what is happening inside a government agency, the inspector general must be able to access the agency's records. This is exactly what the law calls for.

The Inspector General Act of 1978 directs that all inspectors general have a right to access all records, documents, and other materials. "All" is not the same as "some." If the inspector general deems a document necessary to do his job, then the agency should turn it over immediately—immediately. But