

Senate Hearing Written Testimony- U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and
Entrepreneurship
The Deepwater Drilling Moratorium: A Second Economic Disaster for Small Businesses?

Tuesday, August 17, 2010

Presented by Norbèrt N. "Norby" Chabert, Senator, Louisiana District 20

Madam Chairwoman and distinguished members of the United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship,

My name is Norbèrt Nolty Chabert, but everybody down the bayou calls me "Norby," and I am Louisiana State Senator for District 20. I want to first thank Senator Landrieu and the Committee for giving this most serious matter the attention it deserves.

Louisiana's 20th Senatorial district is a very unique and special place. Geographically, it is comprised of the southern-most portions of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. It is home to some of South Louisiana's most famous bayous: bayou Terrebonne, my home of bayou Lil Caillou; and the most dominate and legendary of them all...bayou Lafourche. The names of the towns there are synonymous with Louisiana living: Houma, Cut Off, Cocodrie, Dulac, and Golden Meadow. District 20 is a microcosm our state. It is flush with shrimp boats, vast sugarcane fields and huge mills, fertile hunting and fishing grounds, thousands of camps and boat launches and miles and miles of America's wetlands. It is also the hub of offshore support and supply for oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of Mexico. And no disrespect to our dear friends and colleagues in Lafayette, St. Mary and Iberia parishes, but it is now the epicenter of the economic impact of the Department of the Interior's Moratorium on Offshore Drilling.

You see members, District 20 is not only the home to the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port, commonly referred to as LOOP, where over thirteen percent of our nation's oil is piped through over 50 pipelines in the MARS pipeline system, but it is also home to Port Fourchon - Louisiana's offshore supply super port. Currently, each and every one of the 33 rigs that have had their drilling suspended by this Moratorium are based, supplied, and serviced out of Fourchon; every single one, members. Much has been made of the consequences of the job loss on the 33 rigs. It is estimated that there are between 6,500 - 7,000 workers combined on the moratorium rigs. However it must be known that there are over 5,000 workers on the docks alone at Port Fourchon, to say nothing of the 8,500 direct jobs of the men and women who drive in and out of the port every single day to provide the goods and services needed to make that port operate.

But neither the port, nor the large companies that lease space there, are why I come before you today, though those companies are directly feeling the pain and financial burden of this moratorium as much as anyone. But they have lawyers and lobbyists to fight their fights for them. I come before you as a representative of the thousands of mom and pop operations in

my district. Small businesses like Tom's Gas Station in Golden Meadow, Pats Dress Shop and Paul's drive through, both of Chauvin. The Galliano Twist restaurant, Marcel's Supermarket in Bayou Blue, and Blackie's in Lockport. These are the places where the workers of the oilfield buy their tires, get their groceries, purchase their children's school uniforms, and pick up a hamburger or a six-pack on their way home from a long day of work. But there aren't a whole lot of extra burgers being sold, or new dresses being bought right now. Everyone in my district is feeling the effects of this economic depression that has been wrought upon us, through no fault of our own. Every conversation I have with my constituents, whether it is at the coffee shop on a Monday, or after church on Sunday, is filled with concern of the impact that this is having on their business, or they are worried about how long they will be able to keep their jobs. Just this past weekend at my local Rouses market I was stopped 7 times by people telling me of the hard times they were facing. Members, this is not a scene unfamiliar to us, as public service is the life we have chosen. However, the testimony of those constituents were all nearly the same, and yet diversely different. A teacher worried about the progress of her class room where three of her kids' parents had lost their jobs. A woman working in a print shop has seen a 50% downturn of orders over the last 30 days. A man who owns a tool rental company has had to lay off two of his ten workers in his shop because they are no longer needed. Every one of their testimonies is because of this moratorium on drilling.

Over the last half century, the hard working people of south Louisiana have built the energy infrastructure that powers this country. The people of the 10th ward in South Lafourche practically invented the international work boat business. Oil and gas is the life blood of our economy from top to bottom, and that blood has stopped pumping due to nothing more than political posturing.

In the coming weeks, and days, more and more companies will lay off employees. Shops will shut their doors for good. Car payments won't be made. Mortgages won't be paid. In Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes the welcome sign will once again read, "Last one out...turn out the lights."

Once again, I would like to thank the chairwoman for her leadership and the committees for taking up this very important issue.

Thank you.