

Opinions

Oil spill: Too little action from government, BP



Edith Veremu
Guest Columnist

More than 60 days and counting, still no action from British Petroleum or the government.

As BP's oil spill becomes a great environmental disaster, BP executives and the U.S. government are playing the "blame game." Everyone wants to blame everyone else for the disaster. The Obama administration blames BP, who, in turn, blames Transocean, their

offshore drilling contractor. The public is blaming everyone, but when will someone take full accountability for the disaster?

Eleven lives have been lost and seven people have been injured because of the oil spill and these numbers do not include the sea creatures that have been harmed.

According to Moby Solangi, president of the Institute Marine Mammal Studies in Gulfport, 23 sea turtles were found on the Mississippi shoreline.

Images of oil-drenched pelicans and fish have been circulating in the media. The last time anyone looked up pelicans in the dictionary or encyclopedia, pelicans were described as sea creatures that live in clean water, not oil.

Since the Deepwater Horizon explosion on April 20, BP executives have been mum about how many barrels of oil are being released daily and how long the clean-up effort will take. Initially, BP said that 5,000 barrels were being released per day, but according to CEO Tony Hayward, that number is miniscule.

"The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean," Hayward said. "The amount of volume of oil and dispersant

we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume." In an article published last week, The Guardian stated that the size of the spill was estimated to be between 20,000 and 40,000 barrels, which contradicting BP's initial estimate of 5,000.

It's easy to blame BP for the disaster, because it is a corporation whose main goal is to make a profit. Since the oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, BP has been secretive about what is actually going on in the Gulf.

A live feed of the water was only available to the public in late May after pressure from Rep. Ed Markey (Mass.) It was then that scientists realized that BP was underestimating the effects of the "tiny" spill.

Cleanup crews hired by BP haven't been authorized to disclose information to the media.

Referred to as "Obama's Katrina," the oil disaster serves as a turning point in the history of the United States. While it took four days for former President George W. Bush to respond to Hurricane Katrina, it took President Obama several weeks to respond to the oil spill. Talk about change.

In his Oval Office speech, Obama said that his administration will make sure BP pays for the damage. Obama also said up to 90 percent of the oil will be removed. What about the remaining 10 percent? Is that amount not important as well?

The disaster in the Gulf could have been prevented if better federal regulations of offshore regulations existed. Congress has accused BP and TransOcean of violating regulations, but is it not the government's job to enforce these laws?

The Gulf of Mexico oil spill is a costly mistake and the environment and public will be paying for this incident. BP claims to have prepared for the worst-case scenario, but is this oil spill not the worst-case scenario?

Internship's tedious tasks pay off



Jasmine Gregory
Columnist

It was June 11, 2009 when I was offered what I thought was a job crafted straight from a dream. I was offered an internship with a large corporation that involved communications, politics and nonprofit work, my three greatest areas of interest.

Naive, I assumed it would be life-changing, delightful, unique and a slew of other adjectives from a fairy tale.

I was asked to begin work Monday, just a few short days away, and had to have all the paper work completed immediately. Frantically, I sped through everything necessary to not only intern, but also to receive a nice sized weekly paycheck.

The first day was a blur as I was introduced to some twenty plus staff members, the sophisticated coffee maker and my very out-of-date computer with enough Web site blocks to drive a 4-year-old crazy. With zero access to Facebook, Twitter and all the other social media Web sites I had come to love, CNN became my new entertainment source; I took all of my findings and wrote blogs on my favorite articles.

Aside from exercising my writing skills, my tasks ranged from completely mediocre, to things that were a little too large to be left in the hands of a lowly 18-year-old college student. There seemed to be no happy medium. Some days, I went home feeling defeated because I barely had any legitimate tasks to complete and found little satisfaction in receiving such a healthy paycheck for doing next to nothing. I honestly feared that at the end of my seven-week term, I wouldn't have gained anything but a superb knowledge of highly structured paper pushing.

Yet, as the last few weeks of my internship neared, it came time for me to complete my final and most significant task. Early on, one of the corporation's newest technological innovations was explained to me. As the intern, it was my job to create a presentation explaining their latest strides.

Now, of course I had no technological training in this field, and a bulk of my remaining weeks was spent learning a lot of nit-picky details that would help me break it down for government officials and, more importantly, their clients. And although it all felt like useless knowledge, it did help me confidently enter the community as a representative.

My second to last week at work proved to be game time as I completed an extensive PowerPoint detailing everything I knew with flashy colors and graphics. After a practice run with my supervisors, I received the thumbs up to present the following Monday during my last week at work. Essentially, I was creating the foreground for a much larger presentation they would be making in the coming months for various government officials in my home state. It was both a great responsibility and honor that left me feeling like more than the ordinary intern. Instead, I felt like a valued member of their team.

After making my final presentations to a team of various officials from my corporation, I received a series of congratulations and well wishes reaffirming that I was, after all, investing in the right major. Something about that single moment made it all worth more than I ever would have realized in those infamous moments when I was ready to smash my head into my desk. Just like my parents told me, it actually was worth the seven-week journey, tedious tasks and all.

Education: More than memorization



Caitlin O'Donnell
Columnist

During days filled with sunshine, swimming and fun, the last thing on Josh and Adam Meyers' minds are their times tables and spelling words. But for the parents of the 9-year-old twins, who will be starting third grade in the fall, summer schoolwork seems the only way to keep their minds alert and newly developed

skills sharp.

Though the structure of the Meyers family's summer is indisputably worth emulating, it is one often neglected or completely disregarded by other families.

A long and carefree summer is certainly a privilege rightfully earned for students after 180 days of school, whether those days are endured or enjoyed. But for those students who do little to no learning during the summer, it is feasible that such an extensive break from substantial brain activity is actually detrimental to growing students. Could it be that summer actually does more harm than good?

The effects of this so-called "brain drain" can be seen in students of all ages and levels of education. After late nights of frantic cramming for a major math test, the majority of high school students would admit that with the conclusion of the last problem, the information is immediately forgotten. When this occurs, the very point of education, to not only learn, but to retain and build on skill, is blatantly challenged.

Though this "drain" is alarming enough, the challenge that a summer void of learning poses to our education system is even greater.

While the previous year's lessons may not be purposefully discarded during summer months of neither task nor instruction, their impact in the students' minds is, to some extent, diminished. With new pencils and a new teacher in the fall comes a mindset influenced by a consistent lack of erudition, a mindset with reduced enthusiasm, as well as aptitude.

Some parents, such as the Meyers, have addressed the issue personally, ensuring that their sons continually practice their newly formed skills of reading and arithmetic. But some school systems as a whole have chosen their own method of preventing the summer slump - year-round school to facilitate

continuous learning uninterrupted by extensive breaks.

Though having been discredited by opponents as yet another way the school system is attempting to oversimplify the problems inherent within the education system of the United States, this method of teaching holds the potential to redefine the learning taking place in our classrooms.

The 10-month system now touted by the majority of schools within the nation was established during a widely agrarian time, when children were needed to work in their family farms. Since such labor is no longer necessary, many have advocated changing this so-called "old-fashioned" method and moving to a more updated system, still operating within the limits of 180 days of class and normal breaks for holidays.

The "45-15 plan" is the most popular among schools, in which students attend school for 45 days and then have 15 days, or three weeks, off from school.

A study conducted by Duke University found that students attending year-round schools were at an academic advantage to their peers in traditional schools. By avoiding the long break of summer vacation, they were less likely to forget what they had learned. Other studies have shown that these students show improved scores on achievement tests.

Arguing that summer employment and extracurricular programs would suffer, others have noted such results cannot be considered conclusive quite yet.

While a definitive conclusion may never be reached regarding the most effective way to combat the growing problem of learning retention, what is irrefutable is the need for students' minds to remain active and practiced during the summer months. Whether that is reached through an hour a day spent practicing addition and writing or through the transition of a student to a year-round school, the decision is ultimately up to the parents. Each student learns in his or her own unique way and the type of school system they attend should compliment, not undermine it.

Just as the process of learning does not end with graduation from high school or college, it should not be momentarily halted during the summer months. Rather, it is a lifelong journey of both knowledge and fulfillment that should be encouraged always.