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EDITORIAL: What Oil Spill?

William Reilly and Bob Graham, co-chairmen of the presidential panel on the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, went to Capitol Hill last week to sell their final report. The detailed document endorses deep-water drilling while urging a series of reforms to make it safer. But Republicans on the House Natural Resources Committee reacted as if they had called for an end to the oil industry.

The commission's prescriptions will require big improvements in the way the industry operates and much tighter government oversight. Given all we know about what went wrong, anything less would be irresponsible.

That's not the way Doc Hastings, the committee's chairman and a Washington Republican, saw it. He said that he feared the report could be used to shut the industry down and that the commission was heavily weighted with people "who had dedicated a significant portion of their career to opposing oil and gas drilling." Don Young of Alaska said the report was sure to be hostile because President Obama "doesn't believe in fossil fuels."

Jeff Landry, a Louisiana freshman, said the report had smeared an entire industry. Tom McClintock of California expressed amazement that anyone would take seriously the views of a former chairman of the World Wildlife Fund (Mr. Reilly) or a retired senator who had once opposed drilling off Florida's coast (Mr. Graham).

Mr. Reilly must have felt as if he had stepped through the looking glass. An old-school moderate Republican (and thus an endangered species), he has argued for environmental values at the wildlife fund, as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under President George H. W. Bush and as a director of ConocoPhillips. Now he wants to make drilling safer — apostasy to these industry apologists.

The co-chairmen received a more courtly reception in the Senate. Mary Landrieu, a Louisiana Democrat and an old friend of the oil companies,

praised the commission for its balance and agreed that stronger regulation was in industry's best interests. Jeff Bingaman, a New Mexico Democrat, promised an oil spill bill to match the sound reforms proposed this week in the House.

A similar bill passed the House last year. But this is a new House — one in which, sadly, antiregulatory fervor trumps even the most sensible responses to one of the nation's worst environmental disasters.