Governor: Oil Spill was Avoidable, Preventable

MOLLY DAVIS, Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) - Gov. Haley Barbour said Tuesday that the Gulf Coast oil spill occurred because the companies involved deviated from industry standards, not because of the inherent risk of drilling offshore.

"I think the biggest lesson learned from the Gulf oil spill is that it was totally preventable, totally avoidable," Barbor told a meeting in Jackson of the Mississippi Energy Policy Institute.

Barbour, a potential 2012 Republican presidential candidate, also criticized what he called the Obama administration's "permatorium" on drilling in new areas of the eastern Gulf and the Atlantic seaboard.

"Regrettably, right now we have an administration that is actively suppressing American energy production," he said, adding that due to technological innovations and geological discoveries, America is now a global leader in terms of coal and natural gas potential.

"America is the Saudi Arabia of coal," Barbour said. "We have multi-hundreds of years of supply of coal."

The governor said he favors an "all in" energy policy that includes traditional and alternative fuels, plus energy efficiency. He singled out nuclear and hydroelectric energy for praise, calling them "absolutely emission-free" and questioning environmentalists' opposition.

"They don't like hydro because they say the dams hurt the fish," he said. "They don't like nuclear because, I don't know why they don't like nuclear, because they're afraid of it."

Barbour said that the United States must reduce its dependence on energy imports from countries that aren't its allies and added that energy must be affordable.

He also noted those steps are needed due to the "tremendously strong relationship" between energy use and growth in manufacturing and other economic sectors.

"We're reducing pollution as we go along, but the government mandates that have been attempted in Washington would be catastrophic for our economy," Barbour said.

He was particularly critical of the stalled policy of cap-and-trade, which would have imposed a cost on industries that emit greenhouse gases. He said that the additional costs from such a policy would be passed onto consumers in their energy bill and would depress manufacturing.

"What they call energy policy is actually environmental policy," he said.

Barbour also drew a line between his own policy and President Barack Obama's in terms of subsidizing innovation, saying he would not subsidize any energy technologies that can't survive in the marketplace on their own.

In terms of Mississippi, he said that the state can only attract more business by keeping costs down and maintaining an uninterrupted power supply.

"We want to be seen as an energy-reliable state. We want to be seen as America has always been seen, as a country with abundant affordable energy."

At the same time, he praised homegrown efforts to develop renewable technologies that are favored by the Obama administration, pointing to solar panel manufacturing plants announced for Senatobia and Hattiesburg.

Although Barbour placed responsibility for the Gulf oil spill on the three companies involved, the president's panel concluded that the mistakes were the result of systematic problems, not necessarily the fault of any single company or individual.

The oil rig blast led to more than 200 million gallons of oil spewing from BP's well a mile beneath the Gulf of Mexico, according to government estimates.

The Justice Department is conducting on ongoing criminal investigation and already has sued some of the companies involved. BP's own investigation shared the blame among itself, Transocean and Halliburton.

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