

STATEMENT OF HON. SEYMOUR HALPERN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM
THE STATE OF NEW YORK

OIL POLLUTION CONTROL

Mr. Chairman and members of this distinguished Committee, the fouling of our seas and shores by oil from sinking tankers is a problem that can brook no further delay. We in Congress have an obligation to provide immediately for effective machinery and ready procedures to combat oil pollution as quickly as potential disasters appear.

There can be no excuse for waiting until catastrophe strikes, and tons of thick, black, stinking sludge cover hundreds of miles of our vacation beaches, kill our coastal wildlife and disrupt our fishing industry. We have already been shown ample proof of the hazard on the coast of England, and Puerto Rico.

Last January, I was proud to have joined with my able colleague from Massachusetts, Mr. Keith, in introducing the original bill, H.R. 14852, to fight the oil pollution menace. Since then, the Administration has responded with proposals of its own, which of course, I welcome. However, I again joined with Mr. Keith in introducing our present bill, H.R. 16559, which goes even further, and greatly strengthens the Administration's proposals.

We have sought to stiffen the Administration bill in two ways. First, we feel that the delegation of authority from the Secretary of the Interior to the Coast Guard for the physical handling of pollution countermeasures should be specifically spelled out.

While such intent is stated by the Administration bill, and while it is quite likely that the necessary arrangements may be made between the two agencies, under the terms of H.R. 15906 as written, we still feel that the more precise language offered in our bill is useful.

The second, and more important, change we are urging is to expand the area in which the Secretary may take action to prevent or ameliorate oil pollution disasters.

The Administration proposal would confer jurisdiction within the contiguous zone, which, at maximum, represents a 12-mile ribbon around our coastline.

Inasmuch as time and tide, and I would add wind and wave, wait for no man, it seems imperative to expand the area within which the Secretary may act. This is accomplished in our bill by allowing such action in cases of discharges on the high seas outside the contiguous zone, "if such matter may adversely affect the navigable waters of the United States or the waters of the contiguous zone, or if such matter threatens damage to valuable resources on or above the Continental Shelf."

We must expect that circumstances will sometimes dictate that action be taken at distances greater than 12 miles from our beaches. Conditions of storm, or simply prevailing currents might make a discharge some distance beyond the 12 mile zone as great an ecological threat as a discharge within the contiguous zone. The 12 mile limit of the contiguous zone is an arbitrary figure which has little relationship to the potential damage caused by an oil slick. The legislation which the Congress approves should provide the flexibility to deal with this fact.

With these changes, Mr. Chairman, the proposal before your committee will become a more effective tool in the work providing a wholesome, livable environment. This Committee has already performed a yeoman task in dealing with previous encroachments upon environmental quality. I commend you for your efforts.

I will not take the time of this Committee to relate the incidents which have occurred in recent years which point up the need for this legislation. You will hear mentioned frequently during this hearing the *Torrey Canyon*, the *Ocean Eagle*, and others. The tragic loss of wildlife and the extensive loss of tourist dollars will be detailed too, I am sure. I feel, however, that this Committee is aware of the need for this legislation and is seeking only to find the language which best meets the problems posed by oil pollution.

In the past the degradation and pollution of portions of the environment has coincided with the intensive use of that portions. In the case of the oceans we appear ready to break with that established pattern. Now, we stand an excellent chance of seriously degrading the seas before we come to understand the values, the secrets and the resources which they contain. Our capabilities for destruction now exceed our abilities to utilize the ocean.