The House is voting on legislation to address the horrible tragedy in the Gulf of Mexico and prevent future incidents.

It's more than unfortunate that it's taken this and several other tragedies for us to finally make these common sense and overdue changes to the laws regulating oil and gas drilling.

For too long, we've allowed the biggest oil companies to act like our nation's "public" land and waters belong to them. Lax regulations, minimal environmental oversight, and a prioritization of dirty fuels over clean, renewable energy have led us to this point.

While the legislation we will vote on today does not address the larger issue of why we are drilling further offshore and deeper than ever before (think: our serious addiction to oil, which the Senate must address with comprehensive energy and climate legislation), it does take some real steps to prevent future oil spills – both on land and offshore.

The two pieces of legislation – the Consolidated Land, Energy, and Aquatic Resources (CLEAR) Act and the Offshore Oil and Gas Worker Whistleblower Protection Act bill – will ensure that American taxpayers are reimbursed fairly for the oil and gas taken from public lands. It will also increase transparency, safety and accountability in the development of energy resources, while also protecting employees who report safety violations.

While I am especially pleased that the bill closes royalty loopholes, so that oil and gas companies can no longer exploit public lands **without paying** (despite the profits they make selling it to American consumers for ever higher prices), this must only be the beginning.

The next step should be ending unnecessary tax breaks for the largest oil corporations. In 2008, the top five oil companies made a combined profit of $100 billion. In 2009, ExxonMobil hit an all-time record $45.2 billion in profits, yet paid no U.S. federal income taxes. In fact, they got a $156 million tax refund.

Legislation I introduced would repeal $35 billion worth of tax credits, deductions, and exemptions over the next five years, and provide us with billions of dollars for our nation's other numerous priorities.

Today we take a first step that we should have taken years ago, but many more advances will be necessary as we work to not just hold companies accountable, but fundamentally change the equation to protect the environment and taxpayers.