



# JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE/JACL

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## **JACL, OCA and APIAVote Visit Gulf Coast Communities Affected by Oil Spill**

Washington, D.C. - From July 7-10, 2010, leaders from the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), OCA, and APIAVote visited the Gulf Coast to gather first-hand accounts of how the Asian American community is being affected by the BP oil spill. The explosion on Deepwater Horizon, an offshore drilling rig, has threatened the livelihood of thousands of fishermen in the Gulf region. The Southeast Asian American community in particular, an estimated 80 percent of whom are involved in the seafood industry, has been heavily impacted.

JACL, OCA and APIAVote met with Vietnamese fishermen, local community advocates, BP representatives, and state and federal officials in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. The goal of the trip was to assess the needs and current situation of Gulf fishermen in order to better target relief efforts and assistance to the communities.

"Through focus groups with over 25 Vietnamese fishermen, we learned that the most pressing concern for people is finding a job to support their families and pay bills while they are unable to fish. The meager claims provided by BP has not been nearly enough for families with house and boat payments. For most fishermen, the only jobs available are with the BP oil cleanup efforts, but they are frustrated with the lack of transparency in the oil cleanup hiring and claims process," said Floyd Mori, Executive Director of JACL.

George Wu, Executive Director of OCA and chair of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), noted, "There is a strong language access problem for the Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Thai community in the Gulf Coast. While some materials are being translated into the appropriate languages and interpreters are available in limited instances, there is still a lack of in-language resources and up-to-date information. This has caused misinformation, confusion, and mistrust."

"We need to continue to work directly with the people most affected by the oil spill so that they have a voice at the table. These communities will be affected by the oil spill for decades. There are immediate needs and longer term capacity building to be done, but it starts with working alongside communities on the ground," said Naomi Tacuyan Underwood, Deputy Director of APIAVote.

Findings from this visit will be published in a report detailing recommendations and key areas of need, which will be submitted to the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and the White Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

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