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TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."



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GUESTS: ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN
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Democrat-Florida

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TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, the story that won't go away--Day 48 of the Disaster in the Gulf. Some signs of progress as BP puts a container over the blown-out oil well that has trapped some of the escaping oil. But the gusher is a long way from being capped. Now what? Coast Guard Commandant Thad Allen is just back from the Gulf. He'll tell us what happens next.

Florida Senator Bill Nelson says the government could be doing a lot more than it's doing. He'll be here to tell us what he wants.

For analysis of this and the rest of the news, we'll bring in CBS News investigative correspondent Sharyl Attkisson, CBS News chief legal correspondent Jan Crawford, and Dan Balz of the Washington Post.

I'll have a final thought on a week when everything that could go wrong at the White House did.

But first, Day 48 of the Disaster in the Gulf.

And we begin this morning with Admiral Thad Allen, commandant of the Coast Guard is kind of the point man, is the point man on all of this. Well, as I understand it, Admiral, they've now put this container on top of the well. BP's executive Tony Hayward said this morning; it's trapped about, what, four hundred and twenty thousand gallons but how much of this oil is still escaping?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN (U.S. Coast Guard, National Incident Commander): We're not sure, Bob. That's the reason we need to get this production as high as we can and what we're taking out of the well, know what the better basis to determine what else is coming out. We've-- we've been making estimates all the way along. Actually producing oil from that well is going to give us a much better idea of what's coming out of it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Somebody said maybe as much as forty percent has been captured now, you think--

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: Well, I'm hoping we catch-- catch as much as we can. But I'm-- I'm withholding any comment till we know production is at a full rate and we close all those vents on oil, and we see what's coming out around the rubber seal at the bottom.

BOB SCHIEFFER: He says that he believes once they get those vents down that it will-- it will get-- capture the vast majority of the oil-- is-- that's coming out. It-- now is he be-- to be believed on that?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: What's going to happen when they close those vents, whatever oil is, it can't rise through the pipe and is being produced may be forced out around that rubber seal because we didn't get an exact fit, because we didn't-- the cap couldn't be put on the containment-- the device as you know. And when the all four vents are closed and we see how much oil is actually coming out around that seal, then we'll know.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Last week on this broadcast Carol Browner of the EPA and BP said that something like twelve to nineteen thousand barrels a day, the estimate of what's coming out.

But Sharyl Attkisson, our reporter, says scientists are telling her that that's a very minimum estimate, that it-- that there maybe much more oil than that coming out. And I guess the question frankly to ask you is the government still low-balling how much oil is coming out of there?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: I don't believe so. I put together what's called a flow rate technical group, got some scientists and subject matter experts. It was headed by Marcia McNutt who is head of the U.S. Geological Survey. They developed two models. One range was twelve to nineteen thousand barrels a day, the other one was twelve to twenty-five thousand barrels a day. Based on the anal-- analyzing the video and everything else, that is the official government estimate and the range. That will be verified and validated once we get into full production with the containment cap.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So you're saying twelve to nineteen thousand barrels a day is not the low-end estimate that--

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: Twelve is the low. Nineteen is the high. In another model, twelve is low and twenty-five-- we have two different models. And, frankly, I would tell it right, these are estimates.

BOB SCHIEFFER: These are estimates--

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN (overlapping): They continue to be estimates until we get actual empirical data.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Admiral, I ask you this because there have been so many different versions of things that have come out about that. Has the government put any limits on what you can say? Has anybody told you there are certain things we don't want you to talk about?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: Anybody that knows me, Bob, and you know me for a long, long time know that is absolutely not the case. I will say what I want. I will say the facts as best I know them. I'm given no guidance. I'm a national incident commander and that's my responsibility.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So where are we right now? Where are we now and how soon can we say this thing has been resolved?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: We're in the middle of a long-term campaign. We're fighting on three fronts--the subsea, the surface area above the well, where the oil is coming up, and when it gets to shore, we're fighting the battle there. This is a siege. It's going to go on for a long time. We are spread from South Central Louisiana over to Port Saint Joe, Florida. It's not going to end soon. And we need to have our shoulder to wheel, do everything we can. This is a very, very, very tough problem.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What should we be doing better than what we're doing?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: I would give you two things based on the trip I just made to the Gulf and the meetings I had with the President and the local leaders down in Grand Isle. Number one--I already talked to British Petroleum about this--they have to get better at-- at claims processing and helping these people that need money. I know that's not what they do as a-- as a corporation but they've got a responsibility to put the people down there that get these claims worked and put money in the hands of the people that need it. Operationally, we've been

skimming in and around where the oil is coming up because that's the largest quantity. It's most affected. We have to tactically employ more skimmers from shore out to fifty miles and try and get those smaller patches of oil before they come ashore.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Senator Bill Nelson, who's coming on in just a minute from Florida, says that we need to bring in the military. That this-- there are things the military can do. What is your thought on that?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: We have used the military where it's appropriate. The military doesn't have skimming capacity, the types of things you do for oil spill response is not a capacity or a competency. It's inherently military. Where they-- where they help and where they have helped is transportation. We use C-17s to move boom from Alaska. We worked with the U.S. Navy Supervisor of Salvage, we used side scanning SONAR. There are assets out there that we are using everyday from DoD. When we want them, I ask for them, and I get them. So I'm-- I'm satisfied with the DoD's support.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But do you think that there's more that the military could do.

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: Well, we're constantly looking at that. I've been in constant communication with Admiral Mike Mullen. We have a team looking at options. Is there anything that's novel, we haven't thought of yet? We have planners that are working on that continuously. And when it-- when they spin out an idea, we say, what about this capacity, can it be applied there? We use it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Admiral, when do you think finally this is going to be, we can say it's done? It-- I know you're going to drill two more wells-- two more wells on either side of this in an effort to-- to stem it. What if that doesn't work?

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: Well, we have one relief well that's now seven thousand feet below the seabed and we have another one that's about three thousand feet below the seabed. That is a risk mi-- mitigator in cases there's a problem with the first relief well. This will only end when we intercept the wellbore, pump mud down it to overcome the pressure of the oil coming up for the reservoir and put a cement plug in. That's what I would call bottom kill rather than top kill. The spill would not be contained until that happens. But even after that there will be oil out there for months to come. This will be well into the fall. This is a siege across the entire Gulf. This spill is holding everybody hostage not only economically but physically. And it has to be attacked on all fronts.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So well into the fall.

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: As far as the oil remediation and long-term environmental impacts, yes.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Admiral, thank you so much for coming by.

ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: Thank you.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we turn now to the other side of the table, Florida Senator Bill Nelson. Well, you just heard him, Senator. He says it's going to be well into the fall now. I think that's the first time I've heard anybody make-- make that estimate. So this is even more serious than we thought yesterday.

SENATOR BILL NELSON (D-Florida): If they don't get this thing cut off and, hallelujah, if they do, there's going to be a lot of oil there in the Gulf sloshing around. And it is going to considerably alter our way life along the Gulf, and it could be the Atlantic Coast as well.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, now you have-- it has reached your-- your beaches in Florida. We're told now that there are tar balls that are washing up on the-- one the shores of Florida. How bad is that? I know you were just down there yesterday.

SENATOR BILL NELSON: It was-- it wasn't that bad. The bad-- the bad part is that people think that there's oil there, and they're canceling their fishing trips, they're canceling their hotels. They're not going into the restaurants because they're not coming. They are canceling orders of our fish houses because they're afraid that the seafood is tainted. And as a result, there is a huge economic impact that is beginning to be felt.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Senator, you keep saying we need to bring in the military to do more. Now you heard Admiral Allen just now. He said we're already using the military. But you think they could be doing more. And what exactly do you think they could do?

SENATOR BILL NELSON: Well, the Coast Guard is doing a great job. And if this oil is cut off now, which Admiral Allen said he doubts that it will be, but if it is, then we've got it under control. Because what they're trying to do is to keep the oil away from the coast, doing the skimming. They've got a suction machine like a vacuum cleaner. Once they skim it up that'll put it in these rubberized bladders. And that way they can keep the oil from going in. That's one thing, if it's cut off now. But if it continues all summer, then you're going to have so much oil out there, there is going to be so much impact all along the coast that you've got to have the best command and control organization in the world, and that's the U.S. Military. Now, of course, the Coast Guard and the military are working hand in hand. I-- but, the Coast Guard is stretched to the limit right now. Those guys are going just as hard as they can go. They barely have time to get rest and sleep. And if this thing continues for months in advance, you're going to have to bring in the best organization for coordinating assets, command and control, getting information right now.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You-- you told me just a while ago that while you think the Coast Guard is doing a great job and you said that again, you also said you kind of got the run-around this weekend when you were trying to find out exactly what's out there in the Gulf. Tell me about that.

SENATOR BILL NELSON: I asked a simple little question. How many boats do we have out there? And, Bob, I got three different answers within the span of an hour-and-a-half. Now that just simply should not be. And I--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): What was the first number you got?

SENATOR BILL NELSON: The first number was four.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Ah-huh.

SENATOR BILL NELSON: Four out there basically skimming up, which is what you want and that's twenty-five to fifty miles out.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, that didn't seem like very many. Then you got another call.

SENATOR BILL NELSON: Then I got another call. No, there are two hundred and fifty out there. And then--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): What?

SENATOR BILL NELSON (overlapping): --and then--

BOB SCHIEFFER: There are four, an estimate of-- of-- of four, but, no, maybe as many as two hundred and fifty.

SENATOR BILL NELSON: And-- and-- and then I got a third call that said, no, we've got a-- a whole bunch on standby. And-- and-- all this is-- this is not to be critical. Everybody is stressed to the limit. And you're hearing the frustration coming out of my voice. I'm expressing the frustration of those people who live there, whose livelihoods are going away. I'm expressing the frustration of those fishermen who can't go out and fish now because if they're a charter boat, nobody is coming, or if they are fishing for a living, the fish houses are not buying their fish because the houses elsewhere around the country are not ordering it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Senator, are they going to have to close the beaches in Florida?

SENATOR BILL NELSON: At this point, Bob, no. Those are the world's most beautiful beaches. And there are just a few tar balls. And the good news is that the forecast as far in advance as Tuesday, is that it's still not coming onshore--the main oil slick. Now some tar balls. And it did--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But if it does?

SENATOR BILL NELSON: Well, then, I think we go out there and we collect up what we can. And-- and we really have to worry when the wind shifts to the-- taking it south into the loop current. And that takes it around the Keys and up the East Coast.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Senator, thank you so much for being with us.

We're going to try to analyze this and bring in some independent voices in our roundtable in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And, with us now around the table three people who I'm sure have all the answers--CBS News chief legal correspondent Jan Crawford, Dan Balz of the Washington Post, and CBS News investigative correspondent Sharyl Attkisson.

Sharyl, I want to start with you because you did quite a bit of reporting on this this week. You were the one who said, wait a minute, these estimates that they're giving us; this is the low end of the estimate of how much oil is coming out. First, what about the numbers we heard today and what really is the significance of those numbers?

SHARYL ATTKISSON (CBS News Investigative Correspondent): Well, Commandant Allen, if he's saying that twelve to nineteen or twelve to twenty-five thousand barrels a day is the range, the estimate of oil coming out of there as figured by the independent scientist that he hired to do this or that he's tasked, that's incorrect. I have the actual report, which shows the plume

modeling team said at least twelve to twenty-five-thousand barrels a day are coming out of there. And, that is the lower bound. They have yet to release the upper bound, which sources tell me will be significantly higher. That has not yet been released by the government. But the government has been treating the low bound as if it's the entire range.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So, what-- what's the big deal about that? What difference does it make?

SHARYL ATTKISSON: Well, it makes a huge difference to perhaps, the com-- how the competency of the government looks but from a financial standpoint for BP, it's the difference between millions of gallons and billions of dollars in fines, because they will be fined ultimately based on some government estimate by how many barrels that they've released, as much as four thousand three hundred dollars per barrel. So, in just the first forty days of this crisis, if you go with the low-end estimates, you're talking about two billion dollars for just the first forty days. If you go with higher estimates, even slightly higher estimates, we're looking at four billion dollars and that's just for the beginning of this. So, you can see how important those estimates are.

BOB SCHIEFFER: It really does make a difference. Dan Balz, you know, I've covered a lot of administrations and every administration has-- has a period where things just seem to go haywire. Nothing seems to go right. But I can't recall a week like the Obama White House has had over-- over these past seven to ten days. I mean, it seems like anything that could go wrong did go wrong.

DAN BALZ (Washington Post): Yes. And, the interesting thing about President Obama is that this is a politician who has, throughout his career, been blessed with good luck. And that has disappeared at this point. I mean, almost everything, as you say, that could go wrong is going wrong. I thought Admiral Allen was quite right when he said everybody is held hostage to this. And, I think first and foremost it's the President. But, it's not just the oil spill that they're having to deal with. I mean, on problems large and small, everything seems to be going wrong. The jobs report that came out Friday was supposed to be much better than it turned out to be, raising questions about whether the policies in place are really fixing the economy. Little problems cropped up. Their offers of jobs to candidates who're competing in primaries against Democrats favored by the White House popped up. They had to scramble to talk about that. On every front, they seem on the defensive.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And, let's not forget the Israelis and what happened in the-- this botched blockade--

DAN BALZ (overlapping): Yes, which-- which creates--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --of Gaza.

DAN BALZ: --I mean-- creates an enormous problem for them in dealing with all the Middle East problems that they've been slow to deal with in any case.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And, Jan, you-- you unearthed some documents this week that certainly gave the White House something else to think about because while she's imminently qualified and nobody questions that, there's no question that one reason Elena Kagan was nominated as their nominee to the Supreme Court was because if there's anything the President doesn't need right now, it's-- it's-- it's a fight, a knock-down drag out over that. And now-- so they thought she

would be easily confirmed I think. But you under-- you unearthed these documents that show that maybe she is not exactly how the White House had pictured her that, in fact, she might be a lot more liberal than-- than people realized.

JAN CRAWFORD (CBS News Chief Legal Correspondent): Right and these documents have her squarely within mainstream liberal thought. She's worried about the conservative Supreme Court undoing rulings that would give a woman a right to an abortion. She's worried about gun rights saying she's not sympathetic to an individual's right to own a handgun. She's concerned about some con-- conservative rulings scaling back rights of criminals. That's basic mainstream liberal thought. But the White House's reaction to these-- to these revelations I think has been astonishing. And, it goes I think to-- to kind of the week that they've had. Their reaction has been to push back so strongly on allegations, as they would put it, that she's a liberal. Like there's something wrong with that, like it's a smear to say their nominee is a liberal.

And I think that suggests one of two things. Number one, they're either so weakened right now politically, the President's numbers are in the tank, that they just do not want to fight. So, they're trying to portray her as something other than what she is. Or number two, they think Americans don't want a liberal justice and maybe are more sympathetic to conservative outlook on the law.

Regardless, I mean whatever one it is, and there's one of the two, they're doing Elena Kagan an enormous disservice. And it's also insulting to Justices Breyer and Ginsburg, who've written eloquently and passionately about why a liberal interpretation of the constitution is the right way to go. It is a dangerous game this White House is playing. They're putting enormous pressure on Elena Kagan who as you said is qualified. She's an intel-- intellectual superstar. They're putting pressure on her to portray herself in these hearings as something other than what she is. They're thinking short-term politically and not long-term for the court and the law and liberal judicial philosophy.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We-- we should point out that these memos that you unearthed are memos that she wrote when a young clerk for Thurgood Marshall, who, of course was a liberal lion. And-- and all of this is now-- now coming out. Now, during her confirmation for solicitor general, she talked about her views in those days as saying, "look, I-- I was a pipsqueak."

JAN CRAWFORD: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: "I was just a kid basically and I was working for this-- for this, you know, liberal icon." I suppose that is the defense that the White House is going to take. But this is-- at the least, is going to give Republicans something to-- to ask a lot of questions about.

JAN CRAWFORD: Oh, absolutely. I mean, these hearings have now gotten much more interesting than a lot of people thought they were going to be going into the summer when it was going to-- going to be a yawn. Republicans have a lot-- she's taken on every social issue in these documents. And, there's more to come. We're going to get another hundred thousand or so documents from the Clinton Library when she worked there as a-- a young lawyer. But the suggestion that somehow a smear to call her a liberal is just baffling to me.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Dan, where-- where do they go from here?

DAN BALZ: Well, I mean, I think one of the problems, and-- and Jan pointed to it, is that this is a year in which there's much more energy on the right than on the left in terms of the November midterm elections. Midterm elections are decided by the side that has more passion and energy.

And right now that's on the conservative side. If this Supreme Court nomination fight and these confirmation hearings turn into another example of energizing the right, that's bad news for the Democrats in the fall.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think we're going to see Barack Obama down on the coast a lot more?

DAN BALZ: I think we will. And I thought that the-- the visit on Friday was certainly better than the visit the previous week. It-- it's interesting, this White House has been slow in trying to figure out both the optics of how you deal with this and the practicalities of it. But, I mean the-- the amount of time and energy that's going into it has not translated with the American people in a sense that they feel that the White House really is fully in command, fully in charge, and-- and if this continues to gush oil into the late summer and early fall, I mean-- then the clean-up and then the economic reconstruction, I mean, this-- it becomes a central part of the Obama presidency.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Ah, Sharyl, what do you think is going to happen now? What can we expect on this?

SHARYL ATTKISSON: Well, I think the government will continue on all levels to try to look like they're getting in front of this, which will be hard to do because the initial perception was that they were not. And almost every action that comes now appears, whether it is or not, reactionary instead of proactive. But they're going to try to continue to get ahead of it. I recommend they post documents on the oil flow estimates, which they haven't posted yet but they promise to do. They come clean with a lot of questions we've asked about how these numbers are being calculated and they quit stalling and giving the appearance whether true or not that they may have an interest, the government, in low-balling these figures.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, I want to thank all of you for being with us this morning.

I'll be back with the final thought on all of this in just a second.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, the air conditioning didn't go off but that was about the only thing the White House team had to smile about last week. For sure, they weren't laughing at the press coverage. The President hit so many bumps. Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank was drawing parallels to the Mel Brooks play, where young Frankenstein is digging up corpses and remarks to his faithful aide, Igor, that it's a nasty business. Igor replies, "it could be worse, it could be raining." And, of course, it came a storm, a storm not unlike the gully-washer that washed out the President's Memorial Day speech, a speech he'd already taken a lot of grief about because he chose to give it in Illinois instead of at Arlington National Cemetery.

Not to be outdone, post columnist Al Kamen claimed that he discovered a secret White House employment office called SHOVE--Special Handler for Offering Virtual Employment.

He thinks that SHOVE is the agency that's been dangling all these job offers to people if they'll agree not to run for the Senate. I think he's kidding. But I choose not to join in the fun. That would be too easy. Instead, I have decided to announce that I'm running for something. I have no intention of running for anything, of course, but I want to see if anyone offers me anything not to. Besides, it could rain.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And, that's it for us. We'll see you right here next week on FACE THE NATION.

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