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'Finally!' BP caps Gulf gusher

Wait begins to see if plugged well will hold or new leak will blow 85 days

By Colleen Long and Harry R. Weber
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — BP finally choked off the flow of oil into the Gulf of Mexico on Thursday — 85 days and up to 184 million gallons after the crisis unfolded — then began a tense 48 hours of watching to see whether the capped-off well would hold or blow a new leak.

To the relief of millions of people along the Gulf Coast, the big, billowing

brown cloud of crude at the bottom of the sea disappeared from the underwater video feed for the first time since the disaster began in April, as BP closed the last of three openings in the 75-ton cap lowered onto the well earlier this week.

"Finally!" said Renee Brown, a school guidance counselor visiting Pensacola Beach, Fla., from London, Ky. "Honestly, I'm surprised that they haven't been able to do something

sooner, though."

But the company stopped far short of declaring victory over the biggest offshore oil spill in U.S. history and one of the nation's worst environmental disasters, a catastrophe that has killed wildlife and threatened the livelihoods of fishermen, restaurateurs, and oil industry workers from Texas to Florida.

Now begins a waiting period during which engineers will monitor pressure

gauges and watch for signs of leaks elsewhere in the well. The biggest risk: Pressure from the oil trapped under the cap could fracture the well and make the leak even worse, causing oil to spill from other spots on the sea floor.

If engineers see any sign of a new leak erupting, the cap will be reopened, allowing oil to spill into the sea again.

OIL A14

How long oil has spewed into the Gulf of Mexico as of Thursday.

184 million

Gallons of oil leaked.

48 hours

Period to wait and see if new cap will hold or blow a leak.

IN PURSUIT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM



Andy Holzman Staff Photographer

Omaima Nasreldin raises her right hand while participating in a U.S. oath-taking ceremony at the Los Angeles Convention Center on Thursday. More than 100 countries were represented among the 3,340 new citizens.

AN OATH OF CITIZENSHIP

By Tony Castro Staff Writer

Like a packed California theme park, the Los Angeles Convention Center boasted a big crowd on Thursday, with long lines, commemorative photos and other touristy trappings and even red, white and blue bunting.

"It's like Disneyland here," computer specialist Yoosa Lee said as he surveyed the spectacle, which included a video message from the president and a rousing rendition of Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA."

And, in fact, the Convention Center may have been the happiest place on Earth for Lee and thousands of others whose lives changed Thursday as they became naturalized citizens of the United States.

More than 100 countries were represented among the 3,340 people who took their oaths of citizenship at a time when immigration reform legislation has become one of the biggest issues in the country.

"This is something you remember for the rest of your life," said Lee, 35, a graduate of the University of Oklahoma who lives in Torrance. "Even in the middle of a recession, I chose to become a citizen because I still believe the United States offers the best opportunities to get ahead in life. It's good to be part of this country now."

In the minutes following the ceremony, hundreds of applicants packed an adjoining hall where the Postal Service was accepting

Students, seniors among the 3,340 looking to proclaim their allegiance to the USA



Flags were handed out to applicants for U.S. citizenship before the oath was administered, while commemorative photos were on sale outside the hall.

passport applications.

"We're flooded in here," one employee could be overheard informing someone on a walkie-talkie.

In a hallway outside, dozens were lined up to have commemorative photographs taken — \$20 if you didn't have a camera, \$10 if you used your own.

Up the way, a half-dozen vendors were hawking plastic covers for the new citizenship certifications for \$5

apiece, shouting out like concessionaires at a carnival.

Children were waving tiny American flags as their parents snapped pictures on their cell phones or filmed themselves with camcorders.

U.S. District Judge Carla Woehrl, who administered the oath, challenged the new citizens to become active in their civic

CITIZENS A8

Parents given more clout in school choices

EDUCATION: Rules making it easier to transfer students, trigger reforms OK'd.

By Connie Llanos
Staff Writer

California parents will be able to transfer their children out of 1,000 low-performing schools this fall and push for drastic improvements at other troubled campuses under two reform plans approved Thursday by the state Board of Education.

The 11-member panel unanimously approved the guidelines and the list of qualifying schools — including 13 in the San Fernando Valley — under the open enrollment plan.

The board also approved the so-called "parent trigger" law, which allows parents to demand drastic reforms at failing schools if a majority of parents petition for the overhaul. The possible changes include turning the campus over to a charter operator, replacing its entire staff or even closing the school.

"This creates an entirely new paradigm and new way of thinking about education reform," said Ben Austin, a recently appointed board member and the executive director of Parent Revolution, the reform group that launched the parent-trigger concept.

Austin recused himself from Thursday's vote on the parent-trigger law, but said he was thrilled with its passage.

"This is simply about giving parents the power to advocate for their own children," he said. "Now parents have a host of new tools, and long past are the days where parents had to accept systemic failures for generations."

The plans were mandated by a package of state laws approved earlier this year that are designed to turn around California's failing public

TRANSFER A6

Time not on the side of learning

CALIFORNIA: Many campuses shortening calendar because of state budget crisis.

By Louis Freedberg
California Watch

Despite findings by education experts that increased classroom time helps improve student performance, Los Angeles Unified and more than a dozen other districts in California are shortening the school year because of the ongoing budget crisis.

A survey of the state's 30 largest school districts found that 16 plan to reduce the number of days in the upcoming academic year. The change will affect an estimated 1.4 million students, roughly half of them enrolled in LAUSD.

"This is a major setback," said state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. "We're reducing opportunities for our students, which puts California students at a competitive disadvantage relative to other states."

A little more than a decade ago, California increased the number of instructional days to 180, bringing the calendar on par with most other states. Two years ago — with the state's economy plummeting — districts were allowed to reduce their calendar to 175 days, although few exercised the option.

Now, however, unable to overcome crushing budget deficits, districts throughout

SCHOOLS A6

FINANCIAL OVERHAUL Bill ready for Obama

One year in the making and 22 months after the collapse of Lehman Brothers triggered a worldwide panic, the Senate on Thursday passed the stiffest restrictions on banks and Wall Street since the Great Depression, cracking down on lending practices and expanding consumer protections. **A7**



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi gestures during a ceremony after the Senate passed the Financial Reform Bill on Thursday.

The Associated Press

Standing room only

Experts meet at Stanford to discuss the dangers of sitting on your behind for long periods of time. **A4**



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