

As oil continues to gush into the gulf — more [bad news](#) on that front today — a federal judge with [financial ties](#) to the oil drilling industry has issued an injunction lifting the federal government's moratorium on deepwater drilling in the Gulf. The legal intricacies of the lifting of the ban, while interesting to law nerds, are in my view completely subservient to the values clash the court case raises. The judge made that clear in [his order](#) lifting the ban: “oil and gas production is quite simply elemental to Gulf communities.” The judge noted that almost 12,000 jobs are tied to deep water drilling, many of them at risk if deep water drilling is suspended.

The Gulf spill is tragic on so many grounds. Obviously, the environmental harms — the polluting of vital and delicate wetlands, the killing of animals, the potential massive harm to underwater ecosystems — are almost beyond comprehension. Then there's the economic loss to those dependent on the environmental resources of the Gulf — the fishermen and women, owners and employees of tourism-related businesses and so forth. But our heavy dependence on domestic oil sources creates an industry of businesses and employees whose livelihood comes from exploiting our thirst for oil, and abrupt changes to the status quo through the halting of deepwater drilling causes real economic hardship to them as well (harm that BP isn't likely to be held accountable for). One of the compelling reasons to get started regulating greenhouse gas emissions is to provide a slow but predictable transition away from carbon intensive fuels. Waiting not only ups the costs but requires quicker and more painful cuts (and of course increases the political pressure to maintain the status quo).

The judge may not ultimately have his way in lifting the drilling moratorium. Secretary Salazar has [indicated](#) he will issue a new order that provides more evidence of the need for a suspension of deep water drilling and the judge's order is almost certainly going to be appealed. But his order highlights yet another tragedy of the Gulf spill, the economic losses the region is likely to experience from an abrupt end to a very risky business.