Meets with FDA to Fight for Louisiana's Oyster Industry
November 10, 2009

WASHINGTON- Today, United States Senator Mary L. Landrieu, D-La., and Congressman Charlie Melancon, D-La.03, organized a meeting with Gulf Coast Senators and Representatives and senior officials in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to address the recently announced FDA proposal to ban the sale of fresh, live Gulf Coast oysters during warm-weather months unless they are processed. The ban, which would begin in spring 2011, would severely impact Louisiana's oyster and restaurant industries, major sectors of the state's economy. Sen. Landrieu and Rep. Melancon have been outspoken opponents of this potential regulation. *Meets with FDA to Fight for Louisiana's Oyster Industry*
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"Louisianians don't want the federal government telling us how to eat our oysters any more than we want a bureaucrat in Washington telling us how to make a roux, and today the FDA heard that loud and clear" said Rep. Melancon. "Fresh Gulf oysters are part of our culture, and an irreplaceable part of our seafood and restaurant economies. Banning the sale of oysters for half the year would be devastating for Louisiana, and I will work with Sen. Landrieu and our Gulf Coast allies to block this harmful new policy."

Last year, the United States had more than 87 million cases of food-related illnesses, 371,000 hospitalizations and 5,700 deaths. There are almost 1500 deaths per year in the United States from food-borne bacteria.

However, on average 15 individuals - all with pre-existing conditions - die from eating raw oysters every year, out of over a billion servings consumed.

The Louisiana oyster industry currently employs 3,500 Louisianians and has an estimated $318 million impact on the state.

Last week, Congressman Melancon co-sponsored legislation to prevent the U.S. Food and Drug Administration from using

Congressman Melancon listens to Al Sunseri, owner of P&J Oyster Company in New Orleans,

federal funds to implement the proposed ban. The Gulf Oyster Protection Act (H.R. 4022) would block any funds the FDA receives from being used to implement or enforce any new rules requiring post-harvest processing treatments for oysters in relation to Vibrio vulnificus. Senator Landrieu has introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

Congressman Melancon has also worked to secure federal funding for a consumer education campaign led by the oyster industry focused on reducing of illnesses associated with Vibrio vulnificus in shellfish. Congressman Melancon secured a total of $348,000 in the FY 2010 and FY2009 Agriculture Appropriations bills to help the Gulf Coast oyster industry fund an education outreach program to at-risk consumers of raw oysters about the risk of eating raw oysters during certain times of the year and introducing them to post-harvest processed oysters that can be consumed with less risk.

Congressman Melancon continued, **"The Gulf Coast oyster industry is leading the charge to reduce these serious illnesses, and their education campaign is working. The FDA should support these efforts instead of heaping unnecessary new regulations on Louisiana businesses."**

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