

Feinberg continued to stress Monday that casino workers, and all claimants for that matter, must tie lost wages to the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe.

He has previously said that casinos are less dependent than some other industries on the beach and Gulf. However, tourism representatives who met with him for about an hour at Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport explained

that tourists come here to gamble, dine, fish and enjoy Coast attractions.

"I don't think he was very clear on the fact that there is a diverse market here and we are very dependent on each other," said Beverly Martin, executive director of the Mississippi Casino Operators Association. She also said, "I think he at least has an open mind and will go into this a little more open-minded."

After the meeting, Feinberg repeated to the Sun Herald his mantra that all claims will be considered. However, the onus clearly is on casinos workers to show that their wages are down because of the BP catastrophe.

That could be a challenge. Scott King of the Gulf Coast Business Council is preparing a report that shows business was up this summer for casinos, restaurants and hotels. Gambling revenue, he said, has been up for the last two quarters.

"There is a case to be made that the BP presence on the Coast actually offset real lost visitors," King said.

Casino workers interviewed at the beach rally said their regular clientele stayed away because they feared oil had fouled the air and beaches. Day-trippers and BP workers were less generous tippers, they said. Several casino employees said they not only lost tips, but also had their hours cut.

Casino waitress Dion Colvin carried a sign that said, "I live in my friend's backyard." Colvin said she has hocked many of her possessions. Her income began to dive Mother's Day weekend,

she said, less than three weeks after the oil rig exploded in the Gulf. No longer able to afford rent, she moved into a 25-foot recreational vehicle, where she pays only utilities.

“My life is now down to a four-by-six storage unit,” Colvin said with tears in her eyes. “I have no furniture, no TV. I would sell my truck, but I can’t get what I owe on it.”

Colvin was one of about 50 waitresses, dealers, valets and other employees from Coast casinos and Harrah’s in New Orleans at the rally.

Les Stiglet, a casino dealer from Ocean Springs, said: “We’ve been completely overlooked by BP. We’re the front line of tourism around here. We think it’s totally unfair that other people in the tourism industry are getting paid and we’re getting nothing whatsoever.”

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