UAA chancellor Fran Ulmer thought her assistant was joking when she told Ulmer the White House was calling.

Ulmer, former mayor of Juneau and Lieutenant Governor of Alaska, was asked by President Obama to serve on the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, or simply, "Deepwater".

Ulmer and others served on the commission for six months and, according to Ulmer, were very successful.

"We finished on time, under budget, and with a unanimous decision," said Ulmer, speaking at the Westmark Hotel as part of the Science for Alaska Lecture Series Tuesday. "That doesn't happen very often."
Ulmer said it wasn't the commission's job to find guilt, but to find out how to prevent another incident like last summer's oil spill, which spilled over 200 million gallons of oil, from happening again. Ulmer and the commission made several recommendations, from restoring the gulf to tightening regulations on all U.S drilling. They also asked the oil and gas industry to hire outside safety inspectors.

One large recommendation from the commission was to improve the technology of oil spill cleaning equipment. According to Ulmer, there has been no investing in new technologies, so no new equipment was introduced.

"We are still using the same cleaning tools used in the Exxon Valdez," Ulmer said.

Ulmer was in the Alaska legislature during the Exxon Valdez spill, and sees many similarities between the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and the Exxon Valdez spill that occurred over 20 years ago. Ulmer said the commission's recommendations to the President could potentially impact drilling in Alaska and the rest of the arctic.

"What we recommended applies everywhere," Ulmer said. "But the arctic presents a special challenge. The special conditions of the arctic needs special research."

Although Ulmer wants Alaska to learn from the spill, she also said the state is better prepared for a disaster then in years past.

Ulmer also thought her experience in Alaska, dealing with Alaska spills, served her well in Louisiana.
"I was a good conduit between people in Alaska and people in the gulf," Ulmer said. "Just as Alaska learned and adapted from the Exxon spill, people in the gulf can."