

News from Congressman David Price (NC-04)

Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DAVID PRICE *Coast Guard Hearing, 10 am*

We welcome the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Thad Allen, here today to testify on the Coast Guard's 2009 budget and its impact on the Coast Guard's maritime safety, security and environmental protection missions. We are also happy to have John Hutton, the Director of Acquisition and Sourcing Management at the Government Accountability Office, and Steve Caldwell, Director of Homeland Security and Justice Issues at GAO, here to testify as well. Welcome to all of you.

Admiral, I want to start out by thanking you for your service to this country, and the efforts you make every day to support the men and women of the Coast Guard. Your leadership has made a great positive difference to the organization. But there are also many challenges that the Coast Guard continues to face, and we want to explore today your game plan for taking them on.

In the 2008 Appropriations Act, this Committee was able to increase funding for the Coast Guard by \$65 million above the President's request, mainly for critical port security, environmental protection, and maritime safety activities. I am pleased to see that the 2009 budget request before us would continue to fund these critical activities.

But lack of funding has not been the main problem facing the Coast Guard, and more funding alone will not necessarily lead to good outcomes. The truly critical challenges confronting the Coast Guard are deeper, and harder to fix – and I should add that many of them are not necessarily unique to the Coast Guard. They include financial management inertia; contract management challenges; the overall age and disrepair of the Coast Guard fleet of cutters; the shortage in Coast Guard pilots; and a culture at the Coast Guard academy that has placed a stigma on reporting sexual harassment.

Your efforts at reorganization have been aimed at many of these challenges; it is also necessary to find, place and support good manager in key leadership positions, and to hold them accountable for achieving specific goals within specific periods of time.

This Subcommittee sees the repercussions from many of these problems in budget requests that grow beyond original projections and delays in producing required documents and plans. For example, the 2008 appropriations law required the Coast Guard to submit with the 2009 budget a Deepwater expenditure and implementation plan that includes a status report on the cost and performance of legacy assets. We did not receive either of these plans with the budget on February 2nd and are now told that we will not receive them until March 15th. Reports like these

should be part of the Coast Guard's standard operating procedures. They should be management tools, not something that needs to be created just for the Appropriations Committee. Mr. Rogers said last year that the Subcommittee would hold the Coast Guard accountable for planning its work and working its plan. That continues to capture in a nutshell what this Subcommittee requires from you.

We also continue to worry, as I am sure that you do, about the experience level of Coast Guard staff. I know that your own report on the oil spill in San Francisco concluded that more experienced Coast Guard pollution investigators were not reachable and that this resulted in "questionable decisions". I know that your reorganization of the acquisition directorate last year was designed to bring more acquisition experience to bear on the problems faced in the Deepwater procurement. I also know that you have talked about the need for a larger Coast Guard, although your 2009 budget does not call for that. I want to talk this morning about why it does not, and about what this Subcommittee should be doing to assess that need.

I want to give full credit, Admiral, for the fine work you and the Coast Guard have done in all of your locations throughout our country. Last year, we met with Coast Guard cutter personnel and learned of the work they perform to patch up cutters to make them operable. We met with a Coast Guard maritime safety and security team and heard about their training. And I saw the good work that is going on at the rescue swimmer training facility in North Carolina under difficult conditions, work that will be significantly easier when the new training facility is completed.

But the Coast Guard men and women who work so hard for our country every day need to know that there is a way forward that will be successful. They need to know that those of us in positions to change things are doing all we can to ensure they are trained properly. They need to know that new equipment that works will be delivered to them when they need it. And they need to know that good managers and good employees can succeed. I know that that is your goal. It is our goal, too.

I hope that we will have time to get into most if not all of these topics at this hearing today. They deserve our time and attention. Before I ask you to be our lead witness, Admiral, followed by Mr. Hutton, I would like to ask Mr. Rogers for any statement that he would like to make.

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