

**Statement of
The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Hearing On
“Coast Guard and National Transportation Safety Board
Casualty Investigation Program”
May 20, 2008**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling today's hearing and your continued oversight of the Coast Guard's marine safety program. The hearing today will examine the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General's findings of the Coast Guard's management of the marine casualty investigations program. We will also hear from the NTSB on their reauthorization request to amend its authority to investigate major marine accidents.

I applaud you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Members Mica and LaTourette for your continued and diligent oversight of the Coast Guard's marine safety program.

I want to thank Ms. Richards, Admiral Watson and Ms. Higgings for being here today and look forward to your testimony.

I seem to sound like a broken record, but as I said in the Cosco Busan's hearing last month, there continues to be a common theme that has come out of several of our Coast Guard hearings....the lack of trained Coast Guard personnel.

In a sampling of five Coast Guard unit's the Inspector General's report found that only six out of twenty-two billeted marine casualty investigator personnel met the standard training requirements – 68% did not meet even the Coast Guard's minimal casualty investigator standards..

This is of great concern to me since the Coast Guard issued 396 recommendations to mariners, industry and other Coast Guard components from 2003-2006. My concern is whether or not these recommendations were issued by qualified personnel. What's the validity of a recommendation if it's made by someone without the proper training to give a value based, experienced opinion. The public want casualty investigators that have the continuity and expertise necessary to identify the cause of an accident and to can make sound recommendations to prevent other similar accidents.

Chairman Cummings likes to compare the Coast Guard to a rubber band that's being constantly being stretched. I want to know what the Congress can do to take the tension off of the rubber band. Something has to be done here to ensure that the Coast Guard has the adequate people, equipment, training and resources it needs to perform its functions.

The enactment of the Coast Guard Authorization Act, H.R. 2830, which passed the House of Representatives by a resounding 395 to 7, is critical, but the Coast Guard needs more. As Chairman Cummings stated earlier, these issues with marine safety were reported more than 10 years ago during the 97th Congress. We need to work to find solid, workable solutions and give the Coast Guard what it needs to implement the recommendations in the

Inspector General's report and solve their other issues before they are discussed 10 years from now in the 115th Congress.

Chairman Cummings, I look forward to working with you and Ranking Members Mica and LaTourette during this hearing.

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