

**Statement of  
The Honorable James L. Oberstar, Committee Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation  
Hearing on  
Coast Guard Drug and Migrant Interdiction  
March 11, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling today's hearing to discuss Coast Guard drug and migrant interdictions. The Coast Guard has been involved in drug interdictions since the 1870's, when immigrants began to smuggle opium in merchant ship cargoes and baggage. We are no longer in the 1870s, and illegal drug smuggling has become a multi-billion dollar a year trade.

In 2008, the dedicated men and women of the Coast Guard surpassed their own record of cocaine removals that was set in 2007 when they removed a little under 368,000 pounds of cocaine.

The Coast Guard's interdictions ensure American family values are not undermined. The Coast Guard's and their partnering agencies' interdictions and removals have greatly reduced the supply of cocaine in more than 35 major U.S. cities.

Alien Smuggling has also become a multi-billion dollar a year trade. The Coast Guard's first response to a mass migration emergency was in 1980 during the Mariel Boatlift when over 124,000 Cubans fled Cuba in more than a 1300 boats. During that time, the Coast Guard worked extensively to provide search and rescue assistance, and of the 124,000 Cubans that landed in the United States, only 27 perished at sea.

Although the Coast Guard had done a superb job in drug and migrant interdictions, they could interdict more drugs in they had additional assets to do so. Working with national and international partners, there is more intelligence on drug smugglers than there are responders to go out and catch them. We need to ensure that the Coast Guard has the adequate people, equipment, training and resources it needs to perform its missions.

I want to thank Admiral Justice and Admiral Nimmich for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.

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

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