

**Statement of
The Honorable James L. Oberstar, Chairman
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Hearing on
“Civil Rights Services and Diversity Initiatives in the Coast
Guard”
April 1, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling today's hearing to discuss the civil rights services the Coast Guard provides to its employees and members. I applaud your follow-up on the diversity initiatives that the Commandant, Admiral Allen, announced last August in his Leadership and Diversity Action Plan Situation Report. I also appreciate your process of scheduling follow-up hearings to track whether agencies keep the commitments they make to this Committee. The issues before us today are among the most critical we have considered.

I am deeply disturbed by the findings of the “United States Coast Guard Office of Civil Rights: Program Review” released in February of this year. But I am even more disturbed to discover that the findings of this report mirror findings from reviews that were conducted 10 years ago. Civil rights are fundamental rights that are granted to every employee of the federal government. The issues the Coast Guard has with its civil right's process date back more than 10 years as demonstrated by numerous reviews and reports conducted by consultants using taxpayers' money. The reports state the same thing over and over again - the people dealing with Equal Employment Office complaints are untrained, the process is broken, and it doesn't serve to ensure that civil rights services in the Coast Guard comply with all applicable regulations.

The Coast Guard has apparently chosen not to spend adequate money to ensure its personnel are guaranteed their fundamental rights to work in a fair and equitable environment. As the service works to defend our homeland, this service must be willing to spend the modest sums necessary to protect the civil rights of the men and women, both military and civilian, who work for the Coast Guard and ultimately serve our nation. The Coast Guard must prioritize funding for this program.

Also of concern to this Committee is ensuring the level of minority acceptances at the Coast Guard Academy reflects the composition of America. To have offered only nine African-Americans acceptance for an entering class of approximately 300 this coming Fall is unacceptable. Clearly, the Coast Guard did not listen to this Committee last September when our Members challenged them on low admission rates for minorities.

In response to that hearing, the House passed a Coast Guard Authorization Act that would have established a Congressional nomination process for the Coast Guard Academy that is similar to the process used for all of other Federal military academies. If the Coast Guard will not increase the number of minorities enrolled at the Academy – the members of the House and Senate can do that through the nomination process.

I want to thank Rear Admiral Breckenridge and Ms. Terri Dickerson for being here today. And I again thank Chairman Cummings for holding this hearing.

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