



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Ranking Member Shri Thanedar (D-MI)**

***Securing America's Maritime Border: Challenges and Solutions for U.S. National Security***

**March 23, 2023**

I am honored to serve as the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, and I look forward to working alongside our Chairman and all Members of the Subcommittee on a bipartisan basis to secure our transportation and maritime systems from those who would look to harm innocent people and disrupt the free flow of commerce that is critical to our economy. The topic of today's hearing—the security of our maritime borders—is an important one.

Increasing numbers of migrants have been taking to the seas to attempt to reach our shores, often in overcrowded, extremely dangerous vessels—and tragically, some of them do not survive the journey. These are men, women, and children who are clearly desperate to find safe haven. As an immigrant myself, I sympathize with their plight—as I know you do too, Mr. Chairman, as a fellow immigrant.

It is not difficult to determine what is driving such desperation and fueling the increase in migrant flows at sea. The vast majority of migrants taking to the sea are coming from Haiti and Cuba, where political instability, poverty, an oil refinery explosion, and a devastating hurricane have pushed people past their breaking points.

Unfortunately, instead of recognizing these tragic circumstances and seeking solutions for this humanitarian crisis, my Republican colleagues seem to be more interested in playing political games to try to place blame on the Biden Administration. In actuality, the Administration is taking action to prevent illegal entry to the United States while treating people humanely and with dignity. The Coast Guard and its partners have been surging resources to the Florida straights to search for and rescue migrants at sea, taking them onboard cutters and providing food, water, and medical attention.

In January, the Biden Administration announced the creation of a new legal pathway for up to Cubans and Haitians, as well as Venezuelans and Nicaraguans, to enter the U.S. on a two-year parole. This pathway is now available to 30,000 individuals each month and honors America's long history of welcoming asylum seekers. Additionally, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has made clear that those who enter the U.S. illegally by sea will be removed and will not be eligible for parole. This new program is already showing significant results. In February, the number of migrants interdicted at sea dropped more than 75 percent from the average of the previous four months. At the southwest border, Border Patrol encounters with nationals of the four countries eligible for the parole program dropped by 95 percent in January.

The Administration is also taking action to stem the flow of drugs coming by sea, as the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection have dedicated significant resources to drug interdictions. It is important to note that almost all the fentanyl fueling the current opioid crisis is coming over land, not by sea, carried through ports of entry by U.S. citizens. At sea, the primary threat comes from cocaine. Drug

flows have generally trended downward in recent years, with the Coast Guard encountering cocaine on fewer occasions in 2022 than in any year under the Trump Administration.

Democrats stand ready to support both migrant and drug interdiction efforts by providing the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and other Federal partners with the resources they need. Last year, Democrats passed the Omnibus appropriations bill, which provided the Coast Guard with increased funding above the prior year's levels, including \$1.7 billion for investments in the service's air and marine fleet and facilities. The bill also provided Customs and Border Protection with significant funding to support border security efforts, including \$92.7 million for new aircraft and aircraft sensors.

Despite their tough talk about the need for rigorous border security, Republicans voted against this critical funding. Worse still, Republicans have proposed bills to effectively end asylum in this country. And now, as we work through the appropriations cycle for next year, some Republicans are threatening to shut the government down or refuse to pay our Nation's debts unless Congress makes draconian cuts to spending—which would undercut efforts to secure the homeland. I must remind my colleagues that the last time Republicans recklessly shut the government down, they forced the dedicated members of the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and other security agencies to work without pay for weeks on end. That does nothing to help secure our borders.

I hope that we in Congress can come together to deliver solutions and help the Coast Guard free up resources to carry out other aspects of its critical mission. Indeed, maritime security starts not at our shores but overseas, including in the Arctic and Indo-Pacific, where the Coast Guard's presence is critical to protecting U.S. sovereignty.

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