

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER HENRY CUELLAR (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

“SECURING THE NATION’S PORTS AND MARITIME BORDER – A REVIEW OF THE COAST GUARD’S POST 9/11 HOMELAND SECURITY MISSIONS”

JUNE 14, 2011

A little over one year ago, I visited Coast Guard Headquarters and met with the previous Commandant, Admiral Thad Allen. We had a good discussion about the role of the Coast Guard in securing our Nation. I appreciate Admiral Papp joining us today to update the Subcommittee on the Coast Guard’s efforts in support of the Department of Homeland Security.

As a Member of Congress representing a district along the southern border, I am particularly interested in the Coast Guard’s work on three matters related to that region of the country.

First, I have been working to support U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Air and Marine’s efforts to deploy Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) along our land and coastal borders. It is my understanding that Coast Guard is collaborating with CBP on the maritime variant of the UAS. I hope to hear from Admiral Papp about the Coast Guard’s work with CBP Air and Marine on this program, as well as what work they may be doing with their colleagues in the U.S. Navy. Given limited Federal resources, agencies across the government should do everything possible to share information and technology, as appropriate, and avoid duplication of efforts in order to secure our country as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Second, as many of you know, there have been troubling incidents of violence on the Mexican side of Falcon Lake, the U.S. portion of which is located in my district. The FY 2012 DHS Appropriations bill recently passed by the House of Representatives recommends the Coast Guard have an enhanced presence on Falcon Lake and Lake Amistad in order to counter border incursion threats in the area. It is my understanding that this area is currently patrolled only by CBP, which is also stretched thin with its other border security responsibilities. I am interested in knowing from the Commandant what presence beyond “pulse operations” Coast Guard currently has along the southern border of the U.S. and how it would intend to fulfill the language in the appropriations bill should it become law.

Third, last week the Texas Rangers, U.S. Border Patrol and Texas Fish and Wildlife were involved in a shootout across the Rio Grande near Abram, Texas. Suspected drug runners shot across the river from Mexico at U.S. law enforcement officials.

Last year’s Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010, now Public Law 111-281, included a provision I authored in which the Coast Guard shall prepare a mission requirement analysis for the navigable portions of the Rio Grande River. The analysis was due to the Congress no later than 90 days from the date of enactment, which was October 15, 2010.

Specifically, the mission requirement analysis is meant to assess Coast Guard missions, assets, and personnel assigned along the Rio Grande River. Included within the analysis are requirements to identify what would be needed for the Coast Guard to increase operations, migrant interdiction operation, and drug interdiction operations. I hope to hear from Admiral Papp about the status of this analysis.

Ultimately, whether we are talking about narcotics, undocumented aliens, or those who might wish to do us harm, we know that people will take the route they perceive to offer the best opportunity to enter the country. If we secure the land borders, people will try to come across our maritime borders and vice versa. We are only as strong as our weakest link, which is why it is imperative that we support the work of the Coast Guard and its sister agencies within DHS.

In closing, I would like to note that the more than 40,000 active duty members of the Coast Guard, supported by thousands more reservists and civilians, do our country proud every day. We thank them and their families for their service to our country.