

Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigation and Management

Field Hearing on “*Preventing an Economic Shock Wave: Securing the Port of Houston from a Terrorist Attack*”

Wednesday, August 24, 2011
Port of Houston Authority
Houston, Texas

Statement of Ranking Member William R. Keating (D-MA)

Both Chairman McCaul and I realize that you cannot conduct proper oversight in a vacuum, which means that you must go out into the field to see firsthand the security measures mandated by Congress to ensure that things are running smoothly and to also determine where more assistance may be needed.

We are here in Houston to do just that.

It gives me great pleasure to be in Texas and I look forward to hosting Chairman McCaul in Boston when we conduct a field hearing there to examine aviation security procedures at Logan Airport.

Today, however, we are here to examine the Port of Houston, which links the city of Houston with over 1,053 ports in 203 countries and is therefore an excellent location for determining best practices in maritime security.

The Port of Houston, one of the largest ports in the world, is also home to the world’s largest concentration of petroleum facilities and a \$15 billion petrochemical complex, ranked second worldwide.

Although much attention is given to aviation security, and rightly so, we must not however, ignore very real potential threats that exist in the maritime sector and the steps that must be taken to protect our ports and waterways from the threat of terrorist activity.

I represent Massachusetts’ 10th Congressional District, which sits right on the water and includes parts of the South Shore of Massachusetts, including all of Cape Cod and Nantucket.

My district is also near the Port of Boston, the oldest continuously running port in the Western Hemisphere.

I am therefore no stranger to the maritime environment and I look forward to examining the similarities and differences between the security measures at the Port of Houston and those at the Port of Boston, which supplies 90% of Massachusetts’ heating and fossil fuel needs.

Both the Port of Houston and the Port of Boston house tankers carrying liquefied natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas and oil.

If a terrorist attack occurred at a port that resulted in the explosion of any of these volatile materials, the result could be catastrophic.

Unfortunately, terrorist overseas have demonstrated an ability to carry out these types of attacks.

In 2002, a suicide boat attack on the tanker *Limburg* off the coast of Yemen killed one person, injured seventeen and spilled 90,000 barrels of oil.

In 2010, the U.S. Coast Guard approved shipments of liquefied natural gas from Yemen to Boston Harbor – within fifty feet of residential neighborhoods – despite concerns that the cargo is coming from a country that has been identified as a terrorist safe haven and previously experienced a terrorist attack on an oil tanker.

The economic impact of the *Limburg* attack included the short-term collapse of international shipping in the Gulf of Aden and ultimately cost Yemen \$3.8 million a month in port revenues.

If a terrorist attack here in the United States caused a massive oil spill, even larger than what occurred in Yemen, we may once again experience the type of economic damage that occurred in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

According to Dun and Bradstreet, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill negatively impacted 7.3 million active businesses in five Gulf States, 81% of which were small businesses with less than ten employees.

It also affected 34 million jobs and \$5.2 trillion in sales volume.

And as we all remember, the price at the pump went up.

Given the upcoming anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks coupled with our current economic climate and the need to avoid any additional damage to the job market, this hearing is particularly timely.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses that will provide us with a broad range of views from the Federal Government, local law enforcement, port security officials and the private sector.