

Statement of Ranking Member Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
Committee on Homeland Security

Hearing: “Future of the Homeland Security Missions of the Coast Guard”

February 4, 2014

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security and a Member of Congress representing the Port of Houston, I know the importance of the Coast Guard to our communities and Nation.

In my own back yard the Coast Guard works to secure the Port of Houston, which is imperative as it is the nation’s largest petrochemical complex, supplying over 40 percent of our petrochemical manufacturing capacity.

The Coast Guard also works to facilitate commerce, which is vital to our economy as the Port of Houston handles nearly 230 million tons of cargo annually, making it the number one U.S. port in foreign waterborne tonnage and generating over 650,000 jobs at its terminals.

Without the Coast Guard, this would simply not be possible. Of course, these examples are just one small part of the service provided by our U.S. Coast Guard men and women across 11 statutory missions both here at home and around the world.

Given this Committee’s jurisdiction, the focus of today’s hearing is the Coast Guard’s homeland security missions, including: ports, waterways, and coastal security; drug interdiction; migrant interdiction; defense readiness; and law enforcement.

I am pleased to have the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Robert Papp, here to discuss the future of these homeland security missions. Indeed, this is a particularly appropriate time for him to be before the Subcommittee, as he completes his four years of service as Commandant in May.

It is also a critical time for the Coast Guard, as budget cuts and recapitalization challenges force the Coast Guard to make some tough choices. Coast Guard has been forced cut back its hours on the water and in the air, contributing to a reduction in mission performance.

This is a troubling trend that must be reversed. The Coast Guard already provides the American taxpayers with an excellent return on our investment, and there is only so long we can ask them to continue to do more with less.

I hope to hear from Commandant Papp about what must be done to ensure the Coast Guard can fulfill its responsibilities even in a constrained budget environment.

I also hope to hear an honest assessment of the resources necessary to ensure the Coast Guard has the tools it needs to carry out its missions, particularly in the homeland security space, both now and in the future.

I know Commandant Papp has been very frank in discussing these important issues previously, and I hope we can continue that open dialogue today. Perhaps no one is better positioned to offer an assessment of where the Coast Guard is today and what its course for the future may be. I look forward to that discussion.