

**Statement of  
The Honorable James L. Oberstar  
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation  
Hearing On  
“International Piracy on the High Seas”  
February 4, 2009**

I would like to congratulate Chairman Cummings on his appointment to his second term as the Chairman of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee. In the 110th Congress, you held an astounding 25 hearings, which is a testament to your hard work and dedication to ensuring effective oversight of the Coast Guard, the Maritime Administration, the Federal Maritime Commission and other maritime interests.

I would also like to welcome Congressman Frank LoBiondo, who previously chaired this Subcommittee, as the Republican Ranking Member of the Subcommittee. The members of our Committee have a wonderful bi-partisan relationship and I look forward to working with you to ensure the success of this Subcommittee in the 111th Congress.

We are here today to learn about piracy and its threat to the freedom of navigation and maritime commerce. The number of piracy incidents has declined worldwide, but there has been a staggering increase of piracy activity off the Horn of Africa.

There have not been any attacks against any U.S. flagged ships yet, but piracy is of great concern to this Congress because it affects international shipping, American imports and exports, and the free flow of maritime commerce. There is usually at least one U.S. flagged ship among the more than 50 vessels that pass through the Gulf of Aden region on a daily basis. That one vessel is critical to the Nation's interest as it carries Department of Defense cargo bound to our troops fighting in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

Mariners should not have to be in fear of their lives as they transit the region in an effort to do their job. The threat of piracy can disrupt the flow of commerce and cause an increase in the price of commodities, including food and fuel. There is also a greater threat of an environmental catastrophe if a vessel is damaged, sunk or run aground.

I commend the shipping companies that are stepping up to buy pirate deterrent equipment and that are effectively informing and training their personnel in anti-piracy procedures. However, there are some companies that have not taken any safety measures to ensure the safety of their crews, the cargoes or their vessels.

The international response to piracy has been strong, a clear indication that piracy is indeed of great concern to the international community. This informational hearing will give us a greater understanding of international piracy, its impact, and the challenges we face in dealing with suspected pirates once they are caught. It will also give us insight into the international response to piracy. I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.