

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION BROCK ADAMS,  
TO THE WASHINGTON COAST GUARD OFFICERS ASSOCIATION, FORT MYER, VIRGINIA,  
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My respect for the Coast Guard and its people grows the more we work together. I had a very pleasant time in Seattle in August, on the Coast Guard's 188th anniversary, when the Eagle sailed into Puget Sound on a beautiful day of blue skies and sparkling seas. I'm sure the Admiral ordered the spectacular weather, and I have lived in Seattle long enough to know that to get weather like that you have to go to the top. Somebody up there likes the Coast Guard, too.

Two weeks ago I had the privilege of officiating at the department's annual awards ceremony. Most of you know that we have a courtyard with beautiful fountains at our building, and we built this platform over the fountain area for the award presentations.

We had a red carpet and lots of blue and white bunting, and I was standing on the platform right over the main fountain just hoping that nobody turned it on in the middle of my speech. The only consolation I had was that Admiral Scarborough was right beside me and I was sure we would be rescued if the water got too high.

Handing out awards to those who have earned them is a very gratifying and a very humbling experience. Among the recipients at our program were 19 members of the Coast Guard, being honored for heroism and for superior job performance. I was particularly pleased to present silver medals to seven Coast Guard chemists for their exceptional achievements in oil analysis, making it possible to trace and identify vessels that discharge oil at sea.

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I was also at the National Defense Transportation Association forum here earlier this week, the day after Admiral Hayes spoke at the awards program honoring the Coast Guard's Boston Marine Safety Office.

The Boston unit was recognized by the NDTA for its work in dealing with the first U.S. port to accept LNG ships and shipments, and for the expert assistance during the construction and trials of the Aquarius, the first U.S. liquid natural gas cargo ship.

That award was particularly gratifying because I recall that in the wake of the several oil tanker accidents that occurred in 1977 the Coast Guard was harshly -- and, in my opinion, unjustly -- blamed for negligence.

I thought then that such criticism was unfair and I have even more reason to believe so today. I've been working with the men and women of the Coast Guard on a day-by-day basis and I want you to know that I'm greatly impressed by the competence, the professionalism, the dedication I see on every hand.

My experience with the Coast Guard goes back to my college years when I spent several summers working on the fishing boats in Alaska. The Coast Guard was a comforting presence then, and it is my valuable right arm now. I'm proud to have the Coast Guard in the Department of Transportation.

You've heard a lot in the past several years, I'm sure, about the Coast Guard's expanding role and growing responsibilities. Those reports, I'm here to tell you, are true -- and the Coast Guard is going to be even busier in the years ahead, for several reasons.

One, marine commerce is growing. Water transport is fuel-efficient and cost-effective. The development of new marine technologies -- containerization, LASH (lighter aboard ship) and RO-RO (roll on/roll-off) vessels make new economies and fast turnaround service possible.

Two, the growth in oil tanker and LNG ship traffic will demand increasingly greater vigilance on the part of the Coast Guard. We simply must do whatever is necessary to guard against oil spills in our waters, and to assure the safe conduct and handling of LNG shipments.

Three, the Department of Transportation is responsible for assuring that the location of new port facilities minimize the risk to people, the marine environment and the port itself. We have looked to the Coast Guard, and will continue to do so, for advice in the planning of waterfront facilities -- including deepwater ports. We shall also depend on the Coast Guard for navigation safety. That almost certainly means an increase in navigation inspection and regulation enforcement, along with a greater use of vessel traffic service systems.



In short, water commerce is again a growth industry, and the Coast Guard must grow with it. And, like any activity caught up in new growth and rapid development, there are potentially harmful side effects that must be guarded against. The responsibility for protecting our waterways has taken on longer and larger dimensions.

The Coast Guard job today is more complex. You can no longer concern yourselves solely with vessel safety; you must be equally concerned with environmental safety. You are no longer dealing just with international maritime codes and rules, but with international governments and agreements. You are responsible not only for the enforcement of marine law, but for the protection and even the development of port facilities -- and that almost always involves a number of public agencies and a variety of special interests.

The simple, direct assault on a particular problem becomes less and less feasible, and the possibility of a perfect solution more and more unlikely. We must make decisions -- solve it the best we can and move ahead. I have been in government for many years, and I appreciate the patience, the persistence and the tact involved in reaching the inevitable compromise.

I am trying to help, by involving the Department more directly in maritime affairs. I have been concerned for some time by what I see as the need for a more rational U.S. maritime policy.

The root of the problem, I believe, is that maritime policy is fragmented among an amazing number of government agencies -- 19, by one count. No one individual is designated to coordinate maritime affairs, and there is no one person authorized to represent the United States in international maritime negotiations.

We have succeeded in establishing a White House interagency maritime policy task force, to integrate our efforts. Additionally, as I announced some time ago, we are creating an Office of Maritime Transportation within the Office of the Secretary to coordinate our own maritime interests and programs. This has been a primary concern of the Deputy Secretary, Alan Butchman.

This will in no way infringe on the traditional Coast Guard mission or detract from established Coast Guard responsibilities. To the contrary, I expect the Department to take an increasing role in all maritime matters. The Coast Guard must give us its expert counsel and technical support. I believe Alan Butchman has demonstrated this and I am grateful for the time and attention he has spent making certain this all went together.

Finally, because so many of the Coast Guard's ranking officers are here as guests of the Washington Officers' Association, I want to take this occasion to publicly express my appreciation to the Coast Guard for its able assistance and tremendous support in dealing with the tanker safety problem in international negotiations last year.



We had a big problem with a short fuse. The President wanted quick action in dealing with the tanker safety problem. In three months we had a set of recommendations to take to the Congress. A month later Admiral Benkert had taken those proposals to the International Maritime Coordinating Organization (IMCO) Maritime Safety Committee. And a few weeks later I was in London arguing for immediate adoption and early implementation of those safety rules.

Since then there have been two successful IMCO conferences -- one on oil tanker construction and equipment standards and another on crew training and certification -- resulting in charters calling for tough new ship safety standards and uniform qualifications for seafarers.

In these two conferences we have moved aggressively against the two major causes of tanker mishaps -- equipment and vessel deficiencies, and human error. As the new standards take hold, the number of maritime accidents and casualties should drop drastically.

Just this week Congress completed action on legislation giving the Coast Guard added authority to regulate tanker safety, including the authority to ban unsafe foreign vessels from U.S. ports and to regulate the transfer of oil between tankers at sea. This legislation is even tougher than the international standards set by IMCO, and indicates our determination to prevent oil spills and our confidence in the Coast Guard's ability to carry out that responsibility.

The IMCO conferences were a success, and the United States was able to take a lead role, because Admiral Siler, Mike Benkert and Sid Wallace knew their business, and they made sure the Deputy Secretary and I did our homework, and we put it all together.

This has been really a remarkable achievement, and the more you know about Washington and about the perils and pitfalls of international bargaining, the more remarkable it is.

The sad part of all this is that except for those of us involved and those who cheered us on, many do not appreciate the significance of this team effort. The fearful and the destructive make the headlines while all too often the positive and the constructive are born and live in silence.

So this is how I know the Coast Guard -- from working with men like Mike Benkert, Owen Siler, Jack Hayes, Sid Wallace, and many others. Theirs is a high standard of excellence -- and they demand no less of themselves than they expect of others.

I'm proud of the Coast Guard. We couldn't do the job required of us without the Coast Guard's remarkable competence and loyal support. I'm glad we are all together, and I'm glad to have had this time here with you.

Thank you very much.

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