



Office of Public Affairs  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
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USCG 01-03  
Tuesday, February 25, 2003  
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### Secretaries Mineta, Ridge 'Change Watch' of Coast Guard

At a historic a 'Change of Watch' ceremony at the D.C. Stadium-Armory, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta today transferred leadership of the U.S. Coast Guard to U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, formally recognizing the change in civilian leadership over a military organization.

"This morning is an historic occasion for both the Coast Guard and the Department of Transportation. The explosion of maritime drug traffic, mass movement of illegal migrants, a new sensibility and responsibility for the environment, the threat to our ports -- all of these missions came to maturity during the Coast Guard's tenure at the Department. And in each of those missions, as in other longstanding challenges like search and rescue and marine safety, the Coast Guard measured up," said Secretary Mineta. "Now the Coast Guard must be ready for this new challenge of working within the new Department of Homeland Security.

To the Coast Guard, Secretary Mineta said, "As you move today, you do so in response to a perilous time in our Nation's history and at a pivotal moment in the Coast Guard's history. The Nation is turning to the United States coast Guard for protection from this maritime threat. You will be called on to protect this homeland in ways in which the blueprints are only now being developed. Your answer must be the one you have given throughout your history: Semper Paratus -- Always Ready.

Secretary Mineta became Service Secretary of the Coast Guard when he was sworn in as U.S. Secretary of Transportation on Jan. 25, 2001. Since that time he oversaw the Coast Guard's response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, including developing the Sea Marshal Program, Maritime Safety and Security Teams, and expanding the number and mission of Coast Guard Port Security Units. Secretary Mineta also strongly supported Coast Guard modernization projects that will replace major cutters, aircraft and the national coastal maritime communications system and he successfully championed the largest increase for Coast Guard operating expenses since World War II.

"I want to personally thank Secretary Mineta for his leadership and support of the Coast Guard over the past two years. His commitment to our service has been outstanding," said Adm. Thomas H. Collins, Commandant of the Coast Guard. "I look forward to serving Secretary Ridge and becoming a part of the new Department of Homeland Security, where we bring a unique mixture of military, maritime safety and maritime security capabilities."

The 'Change of Watch' ceremony is similar to a Change of Command, a time-honored military tradition that formally restates to the officers and crew the continuity of the authority of command. Like the Change of Command, this Change of Watch represents a transfer of oversight of the Coast Guard from Secretary Mineta to Secretary Ridge.

"The Coast Guard's unique military and maritime mission will be a cornerstone of the Department of Homeland Security. Their fundamental responsibilities -- preparedness, protection, response and recovery-- cut across all facets of the Department's mission," said Secretary Ridge. "Secretary Mineta's stewardship personifies the very spirit and attitude of the men and women of the Coast Guard."

On Nov. 25, 2002, President Bush signed legislation creating the Department of Homeland Security to meet terrorist threats against Americans at home. Bringing together the Coast Guard and over 20 federal agencies, it is the largest and most complex government reorganization since the creation of the Department of Defense. The Coast Guard will formally change departments on March 1.

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