

Rep. John Garamendi  
Opening Statement  
House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Hearing

“Coast Guard Mission Balance and Capabilities”

February 26, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling this morning’s hearing to discuss the internal processes and external factors that dictate how the United States Coast Guard fulfills its diverse portfolio of responsibilities and allocates its resources to meet those challenges.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to extend my congratulations to you for your appointment as chairman of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation for the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. As the new ranking Democrat member on the Coast Guard subcommittee I look forward to working closely with you as we secure the needs of the Coast Guard and the issues affecting maritime transportation.

As fellow Californians, we both realize that few Federal agencies are as important as the United States Coast Guard. We also recognize that our maritime economy which contributes more than \$649 billion annually to the U.S. gross domestic product and sustains more than 13 million jobs remains a key source of prosperity for the overall American economy – not least of which for the rice producers and other farmers and fishermen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> District I’m honored to represent..

The Coast Guard’s presence on the Pacific Coast dates back to 1848, when the Revenue Cutter LAWRENCE was dispatched to San Francisco to maintain maritime order during the chaotic days of the California Gold Rush. Growing from that one ship, the Coast Guard’s Eleventh District now includes 48 units, employs over 2,600 active duty, reserve, and civilian employees, and is responsible for 3.3 million square miles of water, including Lakes Powell, Tahoe, Meade, Havasu and Mojave. District Eleven is also responsible for 386 navigable waterways, more than 1,120 navigation aids, 580 bridges, and the security of 2 nuclear power plants with ocean access.

Closer to my congressional district and near California’s rugged North Coast, Coast Guard Sector San Francisco is annually one of the service’s busiest sectors for search and rescue. Sector San Francisco also maintains critical aids to navigation that link the ports and communities within the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta to the Golden Gate. This vital activity helps ensure safe and reliable maritime transportation for several important ports, including the Port of Oakland, our Nation’s fourth busiest container port, and the Concord Naval Weapons Station, one of five designated Strategic Sea Ports in California.

As we export to the world, I hope this committee will also look into ways the Coast Guard can increase its commitment to American manufacturing. The Coast Guard

creates jobs by protecting our waterways; they can also create jobs by implementing a stronger Buy America policy, using our limited taxpayer dollars to buy the goods and equipment the Coast Guard needs from companies that manufacture here in America.

It is no understatement to say that the Coast Guard is indispensable. It is hard to actually imagine the smooth functioning of our Maritime Transportation System without a ready and able Coast Guard.

Yet, here we are Mr. Chairman, virtually days from seeing the indiscriminate cuts imposed by sequestration kick in – cuts that will reduce Coast Guard mission hours by 20 percent – and no one really seems to be concerned about what this will mean for the readiness and capabilities of the United States Coast Guard.

I commend you for scheduling this morning's hearing to look at how the Coast Guard maintains balance across its eleven statutory missions. All of these missions are important. None of them should be subjected to cuts and reductions that are wholly arbitrary and ill-advised.

But really, what does mean? Allow me to state some simple questions to frame the real life consequences:

- Who on this subcommittee does not want the Coast Guard to be able to respond to catastrophic oil spills or a cruise ship in distress?
- Who does not want the Coast Guard to be able to seize illegal narcotics at sea?
- Who does not want the Coast Guard to be able to inspect vessels to ensure port security and maritime safety and to prevent human trafficking?
- Who among us does not want the Coast Guard to maintain aids to navigation or protect our commercial fisheries from foreign poachers?

None of us, of course, would want the Coast Guard to sacrifice these activities. But as a result of sequestration Mr. Chairman, these questions will become the types of strategic and tactical choices that we are going to pass on, by default, to Vice Admiral Neffenger and the men and women who serve in the Coast Guard.

We can, and should, do better, and I hope that this hearing serves to motivate all of us to recognize the severity of what is at stake, and to work together to ensure that the Coast Guard remains now, and in the future, *Semper Paratus* – Always Ready.

Thank you.