

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper

“Securing the Border: Understanding Threats and Strategies for the Maritime Border”

July 15, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. And thanks to our witnesses, as well, for joining us. Today, we take note of an important but often overlooked aspect of our homeland security – our nation’s maritime borders.

The United States has more than 95,000 miles of shoreline. The oceans, rivers, and lakes bordering the United States are both natural barriers and super highways. My home state of Delaware alone has over 350 miles of shoreline. It is also home to the Port of Wilmington, which ranks as the nation’s leading gateway for imports of fresh fruit, bananas, and juice concentrate. So maritime activity is serious business for us in Delaware. And I know it is for many others on this Committee, as well.

But the same waters that facilitate so much legitimate travel and trade can also be a pathway for many illegal activities. For example, we know that drug traffickers, human smugglers, and counterfeiters all take advantage of the difficulty in securing our maritime borders.

Maintaining ‘situational’ or ‘domain’ awareness of our country’s vast maritime borders is extremely challenging. Trying to actually disrupt or intercept threats that approach by water can be even more daunting.

Thankfully, we have many federal workers who dedicate their lives to stopping threats from entering our country by water. [Just last week, I had the pleasure of meeting several dozen of these fine people at the Coast Guard station at Indian River Inlet near Rehoboth Beach in Delaware.](#)

I am so proud of the work that Captain Cooper, Petty Officer Greenwell, and the rest of men and women at Indian River Inlet are doing. Day and night, Captain Cooper and his team patrol our busy coasts in Delaware and along the Atlantic and are ‘always ready’ to provide assistance should there ever be an emergency. Thank you for all that you do for the people of our state and for our country, as well as for our guests.

The Department of Homeland Security has a unique and leading role in maritime border security. It is home to the U.S. Coast Guard, the Office of Air and Marine within Customs and Border Protection, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which conducts investigations to disrupt trafficking and other threats. These agencies or their predecessors have been protecting our shores since the founding of our nation. We are fortunate to have leaders from each of these agencies here today to talk with us about the important work they do.

“It is my hope that we can learn more about a few key issues here today. First, we need to understand the current state of our maritime border security. I’d also like for our witnesses to talk

about what a secure maritime border looks like to them. Next, we need to develop a better understanding of the top threats in the maritime environment and how they are evolving.

As we have tightened up security on our southern land border, for example, traffickers and smugglers are seeking out other paths in the Caribbean or the Pacific coast. We need to be ready to combat this trend, as we continue to ‘squeeze the balloon’ along our land borders. Given the vastness of our maritime borders, it’s important that there is close coordination among agencies, as well as good cooperation with our trusted international partners.

Finally, I hope to hear today from each of our witnesses about the equipment and resources available to you and your colleagues to ensure our maritime border security. For instance, I know that you often rely on air surveillance to direct where vessels should go to disrupt criminal activity. Yet too many times, we have assets up in the air without the right kind of technology or surveillance packages. This also hampers our efforts on our land borders while wasting a lot of taxpayers’ dollars. We need to be smarter than that.

Thanks again to all of our witnesses for being with us today to discuss these important issues. I look forward to your testimony.

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