

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Deepwater: Charting a Course for Safer Waters”

May 17, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the joint hearing with the Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism and the Subcommittee on Management, Investigations and Oversight entitled “Deepwater: Charting a Course for Safer Waters:”

“Every day, the valiant members of the United States Coast Guard risk their lives to rescue and protect the American people. The continued success of this critical mission is dependant upon Coast Guard assets, which are already old and aging by the day.

In the 1990s, the Coast Guard began a single procurement program to replace many of its aircraft and boats -- the Integrated Deepwater System program, or Deepwater. The plan was to set forth broad mission requirements and then to rely on private contractors to determine the mix of assets necessary to carry out those missions. Ultimately, the contract was awarded to ‘Integrated Coast Guard System’ (ICGS), a consortium headed by Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman.

As we know, the Deepwater program has been beset with problems that were capped by the dry-docking of eight of the Coast Guard’s cutters. We can and will continue to investigate what went wrong with Deepwater, but my focus today is somewhat different.

I believe at this point we need to ask, ‘What does the Coast Guard need to do to get this program right this time?’ Coast Guard leadership apparently believes it has found part of the answer to this question, with the recent announcement that Coast Guard will take over the management of the entire Deepwater program.

However, this decision raises additional questions that must be answered. Specifically, what has changed to allow the Coast Guard to take over the program? And if this is the better way to go, why wasn’t it done years ago? Finally, how much taxpayer money has been wasted on a contractor it turns out we didn’t need?

Going forward, we need to know whether the Coast Guard has personnel with the requisite expertise to manage the Deepwater program effectively. Only with appropriate personnel can Coast Guard avoid repeating past mistakes.

It is my hope today that the Committee will begin to get answers to many of these questions, for the good of the Deepwater program, the future of the Coast Guard, and the security of our nation.”

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