

Good afternoon. It is my distinct pleasure to convene this hearing today in order to consider the nomination of Admiral Thomas H. Collins to be the 22nd Commandant of the United States Coast Guard. A native of Stoughton, Massachusetts, Admiral Collins has served as Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard since June 2000. I would also like to welcome his wife, Nancy, who I understand is with us here today.

Admiral Collins has had a long and distinguished career. He graduated from the Coast Guard Academy in 1968 and has served in a variety of billets over the years including Pacific Area Commander and Chief of Coast Guard Acquisitions. Being from

Massachusetts, Admiral Collins is obviously qualified to be the next Commandant.

I notice that the current Commandant, Admiral Jim Loy is here. Admiral Loy has expertly piloted the Coast Guard through some troubled waters the last four years. Admiral, you are to be commended for your leadership of the Coast Guard, especially after the events of September 11, and I want to personally thank you for your exemplary service and dedication to duty.

Admiral Collins, you have some big shoes to fill. I am sure you are well aware of the challenges you face as the

next Commandant, but for the benefit of the audience here today allow me to offer some interesting facts that the general public may not realize, and will explain why Senator Snowe and myself have worked so hard over the years to get you the resources you so desperately need.

The Coast Guard is comprised of approximately 35,000 uniformed personnel. That's roughly the size of the New York City Police Department. Every day on average the Coast Guard will save 14 lives, seize 209 pounds of marijuana and 170 pounds of cocaine, and save \$2.5 million in property. Through boater safety programs and

maintenance of an extensive network of aids to navigation, the Coast Guard protects thousands of other people engaged in coastwise trade, commercial fishing activities, and recreational boating. The Coast Guard is on the front line in enforcing our fisheries laws, and laws protecting our marine natural resources.

In addition, the events of September 11 resulted in a new normalcy for the Coast Guard as port security and homeland defense missions rose to the forefront. Over 95% of our overseas commerce is carried through seaports, and prior to September 11, only 2% of these containers were inspected. The

United States has more than 1,000 harbor channels and 25,000 miles of inland, intra coastal, and coastal waterways which serve over 300 ports, comprised of more than 3,700 terminals that handle passenger and cargo movements. Furthermore, each year the U.S. marine transportation system moves more than 2 billion tons of domestic and international freight, imports 3.3 billion tons of domestic oil, transports 134 million passengers by ferry, serves 78 million Americans engaged in recreational boating, and hosts more than 5 million cruise ship passengers. Obviously this country needs a viable and robust Coast Guard for all of this Commerce to occur, safely,

efficiently and most importantly without terrorist incident.

In addition to all of these responsibilities Admiral, the Coast Guard is just beginning two major acquisition programs, the Integrated Deepwater System and the National Distress Response System Modernization Project, both of which are long overdue and will greatly improve the level of service the Coast Guard provides to the nation. It is absolutely essential that we modernize our Coast Guard in a manner that makes sense, and that we fix the National Distress Response System which is the back bone of the search and rescue

program.

As you know, the Inspector General recently identified 88 coverage gaps in the National Distress Response system totaling 21,490 nautical miles. This represents an area roughly the size of New Jersey, New Hampshire and Maryland combined. There are four of these gaps off the coasts of Massachusetts and South Carolina and two off the coast of Maine. I can assure you that neither our distinguished chairman, Senator Hollings, nor myself or Senator Snowe are pleased with this situation and I urge you to give this matter your utmost attention.

I fully support your nomination, and look forward to working with you in the future, once you have been confirmed.