

**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE
ON
Commerce,
Science, and
Transportation**

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**Statement of Senator John Breaux at the
Senate Commerce Committee Field Hearing on Seaport Security
Charleston, South Carolina – February 19, 2002**

Senator Hollings, I wanted to thank you for scheduling this hearing, and also want to commend the people of Charleston and the port for helping facilitate our visit and our hearing.

On any given day on Capitol Hill, as many 20 congressional hearings can take place at one time. At these hearings, we call upon policy experts to enlighten us with new ideas for improving the safety, security and prosperity of our country.

But it is good to get outside of Washington. We need to hear new voices with fresh ideas. Conducting these field hearings helps us learn more about the challenges facing local citizens, local governments, and local businesses as they try to improve the quality of life in their communities.

And touring the places and facilities directly impacted by our public policies and new laws helps us learn more about what is happening on the ground — where the rubber meets the road — or, in the case of the Port of Charleston, where the hull meets the waves.

I also wanted to add my condolences, congratulations and appreciation to Admiral Loy. I add my condolences, because Admiral Loy will be sorely missed; I add my congratulations and appreciation because he should be congratulated for his fine work in leading one of the premier maritime units in the world, and also know that he was appreciated for his efforts.

As you mentioned, I recently took my Subcommittee on a road trip, or maybe more accurately road, plane, and boat trip. We visited seaports at Port Everglades, Florida, Port of New Orleans, and the Port of Houston. It really was an eye-opening experience. For instance, in my home state of Louisiana, we will have a huge challenge with port security. The Mississippi River bisects my state, and up and

down the river for two hundred miles are a continuous string of ports, docks and waterfront facilities, many of them filled with explosive materials, hazmat, and petrochemicals.

The size of these ships can hardly be imagined. While in New Orleans, I had occasion to board a freighter with Sea Marshal's boarding party coming into the City of New Orleans, and when on the bridge, we were looking down at most of the city of New Orleans, with two thirds of a mile of steel in front of us. These ships, while currently being the lifeblood to my state's trade and industry, could also pose to be a huge threat to my state, and ultimately to the health of this nation. When, we were forced to close down the airport system, we were able to regain complete control. Could you imagine what would happen if we were to be forced to exert the level of control over our maritime trade on the Mississippi River, that we did with our airports. It would take months, potentially wrecking thousands of industries.

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The Port of Houston was even more amazing. Our entire maritime system transports 25 percent of all hazardous materials and 75 percent of all petroleum used in the United States — and much of that cargo travels right through this area. Along the 52-mile Houston Ship Channel, there are 150 chemical plants, storage facilities and oil refineries. When we powered by down the Channel, I witnessed two 800 or 900 foot propane tankers moored side by side, attached to a pipeline system that stretched back to a field of propane tanks, as far as the eye could see.

When I asked what sort of security in place, the Coast Guard responded that a security zone had been established, when I asked what that constituted, the response was that it was a notice to mariners that it was off limits. Well in essence, this sort of security is no more than a "no trespass" sign — obviously, this is not adequate given the risks. However, I also do not think that the entire blame rests with the Coast Guard, they do not have the assets to protect our maritime environment 24 hours a day seven days a week. This has to be a cooperative effort. The private sector has a role in securing their ships and terminals.

We really need to get going on this issue, for instance, your average marine container can carry 60,000 lbs., and I would note, that Timothy McVeigh used only 15,000 lbs. of ammonium nitrate to blow up the Oklahoma City Federal Building. The Port of Charleston handled more than 1.5 million of these containers last year from all over the world, and yet Customs inspects less than 2% of these.

S. 1214, the Port and Maritime Security Act is a necessary first step to start coordinating a system of security at our ports, but ultimately, it is going to require a lot of hard work here on the local level in places like Charleston.

Mr. Chairman, I am currently in the process of working on a bi-partisan bill of additional measures that I think will strengthen in further, the provisions of S. 1214. I was concerned after visiting in New Orleans, that the U.S. government is only tracking the progress of vessels in a very few places in the United States, despite the fact that technology is readily available to require GPS transponders to be carried, and vessels to be tracked once entering into U.S. waters. The technology is inexpensive, and not to allow the Coast guard to keep track of shipping should not be an option.

I am also concerned about the quality of information that is available to identify and verify both foreign vessels and foreign seamen, to ensure that they are who they say they are. We need some sort of international system to verify the status of the maritime industry, if we are to avoid leaving the door wide open to potential threats — again this is not that onerous a requirement. At a hearing I chaired last year, it was revealed that the Coast Guard alone, had identified over 1,000 seamen operating on board

Panamanian vessels with fraudulent licenses. Close to two-thirds of the world's fleet operates under flags-of-convenience. Places such as Liberia, Panama, the Marshall Islands. These nations will have to take steps to ensure that vessels operating under their registries are not security risks to our nation.

I also want to work with the Coast Guard to ensure that we can better protect security zones, and protect vessels who pose higher risks to the environment or to our security, or to the health and welfare of the public.

We have too much at risk here not to move, and not to move fast, on policies that for the first time will coordinate protection and strengthen our maritime borders.

Mr. Chairman, once again, I would like to thank you for scheduling this hearing, and I look forward to the testimony.

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