

INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO COMBATE MARITIME PIRACY

**Hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on
International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight**

April 30, 2009

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL DELAHUNT

This hearing will come to order.

At the outset, I want to note that one of our witnesses, Ambassador Mull, has to leave by 2:15. So I would request that only myself and our Ranking Member make brief opening statements, so that we can get to Ambassador Mull's testimony as quickly as possible.

This is the first of a series of hearings this Subcommittee will hold on the pressing issue of international maritime piracy. Earlier this month our nation watched as the MV Maersk Alabama was hijacked off the coast of Somalia and an American citizen, Captain Richard Phillips, was held hostage for days in a lifeboat. Shortly after Captain Phillips's heroic rescue, another American vessel, the MV Liberty Sun, was also attacked by Somali pirates making good on the pirates' threat to target and attack American ships. While the Liberty Sun avoided the Maersk Alabama's fate, the attack is only further evidence that international piracy is an ongoing threat that must be dealt with.

While today the focus is off the coast of Somalia, five years ago the hotspot for piracy was in the Straits of Malacca. Five years from now, it will likely be elsewhere

in the world. Therefore it is imperative that we work to devise an international infrastructure that can handle the threat of piracy wherever it emerges.

I have come to learn that there will be no easy answers in the piracy debate. It will be important for us to listen to all interested parties and to educate ourselves on the array of international issues tied up in maritime piracy. Piracy will present a particularly difficult task because it is not only an American problem—but an international problem that will need a coordinated response from the world community.

I have found that opinions vary on how we can solve the piracy problem. Some, like General David Petraeus, have suggested we place armed guards on merchant vessels. Others have claimed that this would only increase the danger to seafarers. While I am initially inclined to agree with General Petraeus, what I do know is that this will be a multi-faceted problem that will require the full energy and engagement of the U.S. Congress. If we fail to act now, piracy will continue to flourish and will have a political, economic and humanitarian impact around the world.

This Subcommittee is tasked with the duty of oversight—which is a responsibility I take seriously. It will fall to this Subcommittee to ensure that appropriate actions are being taken to address the growing piracy problem and that we are working on ways to protect American citizens at sea. I was pleased to learn that the State Department has been moving aggressively under the direction of Secretary of State

Clinton to confront the piracy challenge. The United Nations and our superb Navy and Coast Guard forces are also playing a key role and rising to the challenge. This truly is an international problem that will require an international solution.

Let me now turn to my friend and colleague, Mr. Rohrabacher, for any statements he may care to make.