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NEWS

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OPENING REMARKS OF THE HON. HERBERT H. BATEMAN, CHAIRMAN, PANEL ON THE MERCHANT MARINE

Good afternoon. My opening remarks will be brief. However, before we address the business of the Panel — consideration of the Maritime Administration budget request for fiscal year 2000 and the budget request for the Panama Canal Commission for the first quarter of fiscal year 2000, I want to welcome the witnesses who have agreed to testify today. I would like to extend the Panel's warm welcome to the Honorable Clyde J. Hart, Administrator for the United States Maritime Administration. We look forward, with great interest, to hearing from you.

Since 1994, this Panel has sought to foster a strong domestic maritime industry as an essential component of our national security. I anticipate that engaging in a full and frank discussion of maritime issues and concerns under the purview of the Maritime Administration your agency will further this objective.

I would also like to welcome the Administrator of the Panama Canal Commission, The Honorable Alberto Aleman who has traveled a long way to be with us here today. We look forward to hearing from you. We also look forward to hearing from the Secretary of the Army, the Honorable Louis Caldera. I understand you will be testifying before the full Armed Services Committee next week. We are delighted to have you before the Panel today in your capacity as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Panama Canal Commission.

As this year's legislative package is the final one submitted by Commission before the transition, I look forward to a candid discussion of this package. This is the time to address any changes needed to support a smooth transition.

While I am pleased by recent successes in fostering a strong domestic maritime industry, such as the new Maritime Security Program and the recently signed contract to build the first large US flag

cruise ships in the United States in more than 40 years, I remain concerned about several issues which will likely again face us again during the 106th Congress. Of continuing concern is the potential introduction of legislation implementing the OECD Shipbuilding Agreement which does not adequately address the potential detrimental impact of the agreement on the Jones Act or sufficiently define vessels relating to our national security. Also of concern are the issues associated with the disposal of obsolete vessels and state of our nation's federal maritime academy, which is in so desperate need of facilities repair and improvement that the welfare of our future merchant mariners may be impacted. I welcome your views on these important issues.

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