



CONGRESSMAN
Herbert H. Bateman

First District of Virginia

"America's First District"



2350 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515 ■ (202) 225-4261

NEWS

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CONTACT: Maureen Cragin

Ryan Vaart

(202) 225-2539

**OPENING REMARKS OF HONORABLE HERBERT H. BATEMAN CHAIRMAN,
OVERSIGHT PANEL ON THE MERCHANT MARINE
HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE**

March 10, 1998

My opening remarks will be brief. However, before we address the business before the panel — consideration of the Maritime Administration budget request for fiscal year 1999 and the budget request for the Panama Canal for fiscal year 1999, I want to welcome the witnesses who have agreed to testify today. I would like to extend the panel's welcome to John E. Graykowski, Acting Administrator of the United States Maritime Administration. We look forward, with great interest, to hearing from you.

In what has become troubling trend, the panel has not yet received Marad's legislative package from the White House. It is my hope that the tardiness on the part of the White House will not preclude a productive discussion of issues of concern to Marad.

I would also like to welcome to Administrator of the Panama Canal Commission, the Honorable Alberto Aleman, who has traveled a long way to be here with us today. We look forward to hearing from you. We also look forward to hearing from the Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of the Army, the Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. Mr. Secretary, although you have appeared before the Committee on National Security on many occasions, I believe that this will be the first time you appear before this panel in your capacity as Chairman of the Board of the Panama Canal Commission.

It is my understanding that this year's legislative package may be the final one submitted by the Commission before the transfer. I look forward to a frank and open discussion of this package, particularly as it relates to changes needed to support a smooth transition.

While I am pleased by recent successes in fostering a strong domestic maritime industry, such as the passage of the Maritime Security Act, I remain concerned about several issues now facing us. Of chief concern is legislation that has been reported in the Senate to implement the OECD shipbuilding agreement and its potential impact on the Jones Act, the Title XI vessel loan guarantee program, and the definition of vessels relating to our national security. Also of concern are issues associated with the disposal of obsolete vessels, and the failure of the Congress to adopt the "build and charter" program. Although both of these issues also involve the Department of Defense, I welcome your views on these very important programs.

Finally, I want to thank the former ranking member of this panel, Neil Abercrombie of Hawaii for his support during the last session and to extend a warm welcome to the new ranking member, Robert Underwood of Guam.