

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Statement of
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Secretary of Transportation
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs,
Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate
April 16, 1983
Elizabeth City, North Carolina

Mr. Chairman, I welcome the opportunity to discuss with you the role of the Department of Transportation in reducing the illicit trafficking in controlled substances into the United States. I also want to welcome you to our U.S. Coast Guard Air Station here in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. As you certainly appreciate, Mr. Chairman, we North Carolinians have a special place in our hearts for the Coast Guard. It is particularly fitting to have a Coast Guard air facility here, so close to Kitty Hawk where, in 1903, Coast Guard men assisted the Wright brothers in launching their first airplane.

I do want to thank you for the continued interest and efforts that you and this subcommittee have demonstrated in support of this Department's and the Administration's efforts to stem the flow of drugs into this country. One of the Coast Guard's major missions is the interdiction of illegal drug traffic on the seas. As you are well aware, the costs imposed on our society by drug smuggling, drug abuse, and the crimes they foster are unacceptably high. Your continued interest and the efforts of the Congress have been a valuable contribution to this Administration's drug enforcement program.

The Administration's goals and objectives with regard to Drug Abuse and Control were incorporated in the Federal Strategy that President Reagan endorsed last August 5. The five elements of the Administration's drug program are: international cooperation; drug law enforcement, education and prevention; detoxification and treatment; and research. The overall effort has concentrated its resources on domestic drug abuse treatment, prevention, and enforcement. The Departments of State, Justice, Treasury, and Transportation are part of a network of agencies attempting to reduce the availability of drugs in our country. Our joint objective is to reduce imports of heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and other dangerous drugs from Latin America and other areas of the world.

Working with the Department of State, the Coast Guard has assisted in rejuvenating the Haitian Navy to enable it to better patrol and intercept drug smugglers bound for Haiti and the United States. Last January the Haitians seized a boat carrying over nine tons of marijuana. This has been a very positive result of the Coast Guard's working with the Department of State and the Haitians to prevent illegal immigration to the United States. In collaboration with the Department of State, the Coast Guard has also established a TELEX link among selected Caribbean and Central American countries to transmit vessel tracking intelligence.

We have become particularly aware of the mobility of drug traffickers. The Caribbean traffic, once targeted so heavily on South Florida, is clearly showing signs of shifting routes to avoid the increased risk of federal interdiction. Smugglers use boats, ships, and long range general aviation and commercial aircraft to carry their wares. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, domestic cultivation of marijuana in the United States appears to have doubled in 1982 over 1981, and there has been a resurgence of marijuana cultivation in Mexico as well. This may be due, in part, to increased difficulty in smuggling from Columbia and Jamaica. United States interdiction efforts must be as mobile as those of the traffickers.

This Administration recently announced a stepped up effort to interdict the drugs that are entering our country. I am determined that we in the Department will do our utmost to support the President's goal. We intend to work with the Vice President and others to ensure that our efforts make the maximum contribution to these goals. The Federal Aviation Administration has employed and will continue to employ its radar facilities in an effort to detect aircraft that may be smuggling drugs. The Coast Guard will become more effective in its drug interdiction activities as new equipment, vessels, and aircraft come into the inventory.

In the process of combatting the flow of illegal drugs into the country, we have not lost sight of or ignored the other very valuable tasks performed by the Coast Guard and others enlisted in the battle.

I would like to close with some general observations about the task that lies before us. We are now at a critical point in our war against the drug smugglers. The South Florida Task Force under the Vice President's leadership, has broken new ground in linking interdiction and investigation, and in achieving a high degree of cooperation among all Federal agencies. This cooperation is resulting in better use of the resources by all agencies and an increased role for the Defense Department. Increased coordination among federal law enforcement agencies will make drug supply reduction, our ultimate goal, more achievable. While we have already demonstrated the value of a concerted Federal enforcement effort, we must, however, appreciate that the drug problem is enormous. It has flourished amid conventional law enforcement for years. We need to be resourceful and creative in dealing with the challenge. And, we intend to be. Only by applying pressure along the whole chain of activity in this despicable business can we hope for success. The Coast Guard is a key player in this effort.