

Tauscher Addresses Investigation into the Cause of the COSCO BUSAN Oil Spill

Washington, DC - Today Rep. Ellen Tauscher, Senior Northern Californian of the House Transportations and Infrastructure Committee, addressed members of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation in regard to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General's report on the causes of the November 7, 2007 crash of the COSCO BUSAN tanker with a support beam of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, resulting in and estimated release of 56,653 gallons of oil into the bay.

For Immediate Release
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Addresses Investigation into the Cause of the COSCO BUSAN Oil Spill

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Rep. Tauscher and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi were both present at a field hearing in San Francisco on November 19th, to begin the initial examination into the crash. Following this hearing the DHS OIG was instructed to file this subsequent review

Rep. Tauscher has introduced the Vessel Navigation and Safety Improvement Act. The legislation instructs the Coast Guard to issue regulations that require pilots to carry their own electronic chart devices, known as Portable Pilot Units, with them to provide an extra level of safety over the ship's navigation systems.

Rep. Tauscher's remarks from today's hearing are below.

OPENING STATEMENT OF

THE HONORABLE ELLEN TAUSCHER (CA-10)

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Hearing on

Cosco Busan and Marine Casualty Investigation

Thursday, April 10, 2008

2167 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Cummings, thank you for allowing me to join your subcommittee today and for inviting me to make a brief statement. I would also like to thank you and your staff for coming to San Francisco for the field hearing in November. You have shown dedication to oversight of the Coast Guard and to protecting our environment from future accidents. I thank you for your commitment.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Speaker Pelosi and thank her for joining us. Your commitment to the environmental health of the Bay is unwavering. Today, we will examine the Coast Guard's immediate response to the COSCO BUSAN accident. The Department of Homeland Security Inspector General has concluded that the Coast Guard's response was sufficient but contained critical flaws. These flaws include the lack of timely drug and alcohol testing and the inexperience of the marine casualty investigators.

Personally, I was most alarmed by the lack of experienced investigators in San Francisco Bay. The IG report states, "The lack of trained, experienced, and qualified marine casualty investigators at Sector San Francisco is a major concern given the Sector's area of responsibility and the volume, type, and size of vessels that transit the Bay each year."

It's clear to me that inadequacies in the Coast Guard's response to this spill can be connected to this lack of experience. San Francisco Bay is one of the busiest harbors in the nation; when coupled with severe weather like thick fog, it becomes a unique and dangerous environment for ships. It is unacceptable that we do not have investigators assigned to the Bay that do not meet Coast Guard standards. I look forward to hearing from Admiral Salerno about why this lack of experience exists and how this situation will be changed.

I would also like to make note of the recently released recordings of conversations between the COSCO BUSAN's pilot and captain. These recordings paint a chilling story of the moments leading up to the collision. They provide evidence that the pilot was completely unaware of the vessel's location and unable to read the ship's electronic charts. I have introduced a bill that allows the Coast Guard to require pilots to carry their own electronic charts.

The use of Portable Pilot Units is an increasingly common practice which will increase awareness and reduce risk. When the Coast Guard Reauthorization bill comes to the Floor I will seek to add my language to this bill, and I expect that the Coast Guard will take advantage of this authority.

It is clear that some ports, including San Francisco, should require pilots to carry their own navigational devices. If the pilot of the COSCO BUSAN had carried one on November 7, 2007, it is possible that this accident could have been prevented. We have learned many lessons from this incident.

I hope that the Coast Guard will wake up and take action on this lesson before another tragic accident happens.

I yield back the balance of my time.