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THE U.S. COAST GUARD: A TIME FOR CHANGE

September 11, 2001 is a date that will be forever remembered as a one that changed the way we all approach our day-to-day existence. Gone are the care free days where we all felt invulnerable to the outside influences of the world, when we thought problems abroad could never happen here. We all now know that the possibility exists that our safety and security may once again be compromised.

With the threat of our safety and security being compromised USCG has been tasked by the Federal Government to not only perform its historical mission relating to the enforcement of laws and regulations which govern the marine community, but to increase this mission to include a more prominent role in the protection of U.S. soil and its waterways. Now that we are almost seven years into our "New World," one must wonder how are things going?

9-11 changed the focus of the USCG, and did so without reducing its historical responsibilities and without significantly increasing its budget. A pretty tall order to say the least. As with most federal organizations, funds are limited. In the commercial world an increase in responsibility and duties typically equates to an increase, however small, in operating funds.



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The U.S. Coast Guard did not have this luxury.

To further highlight its role as the "go to" organization for homeland security, the U.S. Coast Guard is the only military service operating under the Department of Homeland Security.

As with any organization steeped in historical performance, it took time for the "grunts in the field" to first understand and then embrace their new mission. Change of attitude and understanding of the new world must start at the top.

In May 2006, Admiral Thad W. Allen became the U.S. Coast Guard's 23rd Commandant. Admiral Allen was neither new to the Coast Guard nor to the trials and tribulations the agency was dealing with as a result of its increased responsibility. Admiral Allen's past responsibilities included serving as the USCG's Chief of Staff where he spearheaded the transition to the Department of Homeland Security, and as leader of the Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina, replacing FEMA Director Michael Brown.

The straight forward approach to problem solving we saw in the Gulf appears to be the same approach Admiral Allen is taking as he reshapes the U.S. Coast Guard into an organization which understands its new goals and responsibilities.

As part of his "State of the Coast Guard" address earlier this year, Admiral Allen discussed a modernization process to include updating the aging fleet, and redeveloping the antiquated infrastructure



Admiral Thad Allen at a recent WISTA luncheon

and business practices of the USCG, as well as the acquisition structure of the service. In an effort to better respond to the needs of ever-growing mission responsibilities, Admiral Allen hopes to add more positions within the U.S. Coast Guard, an organization that, surprising, has not grown in 50 years. In fact, the Admiral has stated his desire to increase the present active duty force of the Coast Guard from almost 41,000 to over 50,000 over the next 10 years. In a time when downsizing and consolidation are prevalent, Admiral Allen recognizes the need for the USCG to grow commensurate with its responsibilities.

Obviously these initiatives are significant and necessary. The USCG, while a public organization, must act with operational and fiscal prudence, not unlike those of us who exist in the private sector. With increased responsibility must come a change in philosophy as well as an increase in people and hardware to be operationally capable to perform the work at hand.

Since 9-11, there is no question that the changing role of the U.S. Coast Guard has not always been smooth. My hope is that the U.S. Coast Guard will succeed in their mission and we can be secure in the knowledge that while there are still bad people in the world, we are safer due to the efforts of the men and women of the USCG.

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