

OIL POLLUTION PROBLEM

Mr. HOWARD. Mr. Secretary, I certainly wish to thank you for coming this morning. Although many of the questions had to do with bonding and establishing who is responsible for oil pollution spillage, I believe that we have another problem that has come to the floor recently with the experience that we had in San Juan with the *Ocean Eagle*. And that is: How we will combat an oil pollution disaster, breaking up of an oil tanker? We had something more than an inkling of the problem with the *Torrey Canyon* off the coast of Cornwall last year. There it was more of an established fact of merely fighting the oil. The ship was a complete wreck, just about all of the oil was out. It was coming toward shore and they had to combat it.

However, with the *Ocean Eagle*, March 5, at the entrance to the Port of San Juan, there was some other factors involved. Certainly it was over a million gallons of oil that had come from the ship, but we also had the ship itself with the stern resting on the edge of the channel just inside the harbor and the bow just outside the entrance of the harbor, where the water is a bit more rough. Something had to be done not only with the ship, but also with the oil that was coming out.

One big question was: Who is in charge? And who has the authority, and who has the responsibility for what must be done in the coming days, and what interests are involved?

With the *Ocean Eagle* itself certainly the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico was involved. Being a hazard to the Port of San Juan, we had the Coast Guard vitally involved; with the possibility of something happening to the stern section of the ship and the channel being completely blocked, we had the Navy involved. Also involved certainly was the company that owned the ship, the *Ocean Eagle*; and also the oil company that owned the cargo that was involved. The insurance company that insured both, which might very well be a foreign company, was involved in it, as was the Federal Government with the Department of the Interior concerned with water pollution control, and this ship was flying the Liberian flag, and we had a foreign nation involved.

I think from what I have seen and discussed with people who work with the operation of the *Ocean Eagle*, everyone concerned was very fortunate that the captain of the Port of San Juan, Capt. Warner K. Thompson, Jr., U.S. Coast Guard, was there. Because he did immediately fill this vacuum of who is in charge here, and made decisions which turned out to be very correct decisions.

In almost every instance he did have the complete cooperation of all these other areas that I have just mentioned who are involved with him. There was a responsibility that he had of the safety of the Port of San Juan. Under that he made many decisions for the good of the port, in attempting to keep it open or have it reopened as soon as possible.

But very often he may have been treading on thin ice in making decisions that he made. It is fortunate that he did make them, because he was extremely able in this. But I think it pointed out the problem and the great necessity of having formulated a method of operation.

We are continually having this problem. The *Torrey Canyon* was