

WASHINGTON UPDATE

CONGRESSMAN ROB WITTMAN

April 7, 2008

As I reported a few weeks ago, I was recently chosen to serve on the House Armed Services Committee (HASC). As a member of the HASC, I feel that it is important to get out and visit the numerous military installations and training facilities in the First District. During my recent District Work Period, I went to the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center in Yorktown (TCYorktown) to learn about some of the exciting things they are doing to prepare our coast guardsmen to protect and serve the American people.

The United States Coast Guard is an integral part of the Department of Homeland Security. It is one of the five branches of our armed forces and performs many critical functions, including maritime security, safety and stewardship. We have more than 95,000 miles of shoreline, and it's the Coast Guard who police and protect those borders. America has long been able to rely on the Coast Guard in times of crisis, as we saw in the aftermath of 9/11 and, later, in Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Captain Anne T. Ewalt is the commanding officer of TCYorktown. She met me when I first arrived and gave me an update on the training programs conducted at this facility. One of the more well-known jobs of the Coast Guard is to rescue those in distress, both at sea and ashore. Some of the training programs provided at TCYorktown include search and rescue training and navigational aid training where coast guardsmen learn to use fixed objects such as lighthouses and shorelines to navigate a ship.

As part of my briefing on the search and rescue operations, I got to go into two very realistic simulators to experience what it's like to take part in a rescue operation. Students at the Search and Rescue School use these simulators to practice search planning techniques, as well as to experience realistic scenarios in a stress-filled environment ranging from persons in the water and flare sightings to boat fires and vessels taking on water. In my demonstration we were put into a nighttime situation where we had to rescue someone who was drowning. Our simulated vessel was a 46 foot Coast Guard boat that, if rolled over by rough seas, will actually right itself.

We also learned about Coast Guard training programs for port and container security. This is a critical program that has quite an extensive cadre of instructors. Port and container security is a huge issue in the post 9/11 world. Ships from all over the world dock in ports up and down our coasts and carry cargo from every continent. It is imperative that our coast guardsmen receive the most comprehensive training possible for this duty because you can never be sure when a terrorist might try to smuggle a weapon or otherwise seek to endanger the United States through one of the millions of containers that enter our ports every year. What I saw at TCYorktown though, was an exceptional program being taught by the most knowledgeable instructors in the world, and I left feeling very confident about the safety and security of our nation.

My trip to TCYorktown was quite educational and an afternoon well spent. The full range of training programs will continue to prepare coast guardsmen to meet the wide range of challenges they will face. I had the privilege of meeting a number of these fine men and women during my visit and was grateful for the chance to thank them for their service to our country. Captain Ewalt is doing a fantastic job and, under her leadership, TCYorktown will continue to be a premier facility for training the men and women of the United States Coast Guard.