

Clinton Condemns Coast Guard Action on Cubans

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Body

President **Clinton** tonight **condemned** the conduct of the United States **Coast Guard** in trying to prevent six **Cubans** from reaching the United States off Florida last month and said he had ordered a review of the incident.

Eight members of the **Coast Guard** were suspended last week pending further review of whether they had violated the service's rules by using fire hoses and pepper spray in an effort to stop the six **Cubans** from reaching shore on June 29.

"The way those people were sprayed and all that, it was outrageous," Mr. **Clinton** said in his first comments on the incident when asked about it at a Democratic fund-raiser here. "I want you to know it was not an authorized policy. None of us knew anything about it in Washington until we saw it on the news or read it in the newspapers just like you did. We have taken vigorous steps to make sure it does not happen again, and the incident is being thoroughly investigated."

Immigration agreements allow Cuban refugees who reach United States shores to stay and seek political asylum while those halted at sea are generally returned to Cuba. Knowing that, the **Cubans** jumped into the water and tried to get to shore after three **Coast Guard** boats surrounded their small, makeshift vessel just north of Miami Beach.

Guardsmen sprayed the **Cubans'** boat with fire hoses and fired pepper spray at one man as he swam toward land. Two made it to shore and the Guardsmen pulled the other four out of the water.

The incident infuriated Miami's large Cuban immigrant population, whose members staged demonstrations against the **Coast Guard**. All six **Cubans** were allowed to stay and released to relatives after being held overnight by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Mr. **Clinton** acknowledged that the **Coast Guard** had recently been preoccupied with trying to reduce the smuggling of illegal immigrants and that this effort could have had something to do with the force used against the six **Cubans**.

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