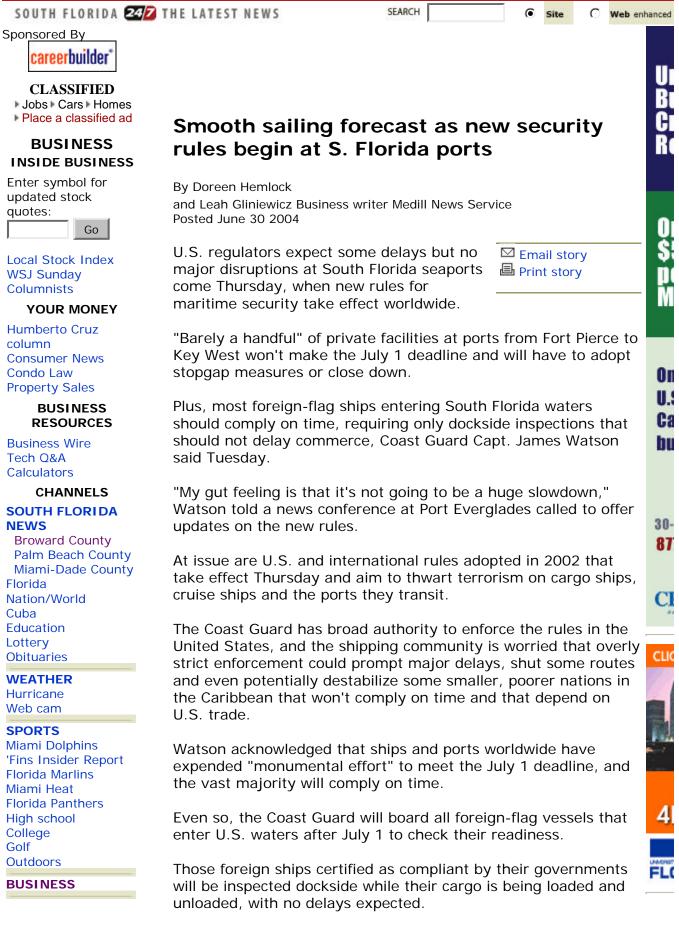
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"We will honor the word of foreign governments that are issuing those certifications [of compliance]," Watson said.

However, foreign ships without certifications likely will be boarded offshore, inspected for a few hours and can be turned back if unable to comply, Watson said.

The Coast Guard now has roughly 40 staffers in South Florida and 500 nationwide trained in the new maritime security laws to conduct the inspections and may be "stretched thin" to handle the work. "But it looks like we're going to be able to pull it off," Watson told reporters.

Just how many U.S. and foreign ships and ports will make or miss the deadline remains unknown, however, with final reports not due out until Thursday.

Watson voiced confidence that all major South Florida seaports -- the Port of Miami, Port Everglades and the Port of Palm Beach -- will comply, although individual terminals or companies operating at ports from Fort Pierce to Key West may not. He declined to offer any names.

Florida ports as a whole also should perform well, thanks to a state law that already required many of the security measures now included in the federal and U.N. rules.

Still, Florida ports have had to invest heavily to meet the deadline, with more outlays still to come.

Port Everglades is spending roughly \$44 million on its security program that includes new toll-plaza gates for entry and perimeter fences. The port also plans to install more than 200 closed-circuit TV cameras for surveillance later this year, said Port Director Ken Krauter.

Costs, technology and enforcement are generating widespread debate as the July 1 deadline nears, including a panel discussion Tuesday in Washington, D.C.

"I think we've done a good job. Long-term, we have a long way to go," Jim White, executive director of the Maryland Port Administration, told the panel.

One nagging concern: how to finance the new security programs the Coast Guard estimates to cost \$7.35 billion over 10 years in the United States alone.

Washington has provided more than \$500 million in grants for port security so far, but private companies will have to invest lots more too, said Asa Hutchinson, the Homeland Security Department's undersecretary for border and transportation security.

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"This is a significant federal investment," Hutchinson told the Diane

panel. "Is it enough? I think it's a debate we'll continue to have." Cruz MATUR Doreen Hemlock can be reached at dhemlock@sun-sentinel.com Marc or 305-810-5009. Poun BUSINI Joyce Kenn CAREEI Hum THE SA Kath PERSO COLUM Questions or comments? | Paid archives | Start a newspaper subscription | How to a Sun-Sentinel.com Privacy policy

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