



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

FY 2016 Budget Hearing – U.S. Coast Guard

March 24, 2015

Opening Statement As Prepared

Thank you for yielding. Mr. Chairman, I join you in welcoming and congratulating Admiral Zukunft on his selection as the 25th Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard. Sir, I thank you for your service to the Coast Guard and to our country. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the Fiscal Year 2016 budget request with you.

As the Chairman mentioned, the Coast Guard has a diverse but critically important mission. From drug interdiction in the Caribbean, to breaking ice in the Great Lakes' shipping channels, from marine safety enhancements, to expert and heroic search and rescue operations – the Coast Guard is uniquely poised to safeguard our nation's maritime interests and to ensure that our nation's waterways are safe and ripe for commerce. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge and thank the service of the 42,000 men and women on active duty, who you represent today. Let me begin by taking an opportunity to again recognize the fine service, dedication and sacrifice of these men and women. As this subcommittee has done in the past, we want to reaffirm our commitment to providing these selfless individuals with the tools, training, equipment and support necessary to carry out their vital missions here at home and on the high seas.

This diverse set of mission requirements necessitates a fleet of effective and efficient vessels and aircraft. To echo the Chairman, we certainly understand the pressures of a shrinking budget – but we do continue to be concerned by the decreasing allotment of discretionary funds to important Coast Guard acquisition programs. The budget you're defending today constitutes a 17% reduction in acquisitions. While I am pleased that you are moving forward with funding for six Fast Response Cutters to revitalize the aging fleet of patrol boats, as well support for a new Polar Icebreaker, the request supplies no funding for the Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC) – even though it is scheduled to award a contract design in the fourth quarter of the upcoming fiscal year. At this rate, we will not see an OPC until 2021, and I am not sure that we can afford additional delays when the average age of the two classes of medium endurance cutters it's intended to replace is 46 years.

Finally, I suspect this issue will be raised in greater detail later in the hearing, but I must express my disappointment that the Coast Guard has not provided its Capital Investment Plan (CIP) with the budget submission. Like every other federal agency, we expect the Coast Guard to plan its work, and work its plan – and it makes it much more difficult for this Committee to do its important work without all of the necessary information. I would encourage you to submit this plan as soon as possible – preferably before the April 3 deadline.

Admiral, thank you for being with us today. This Committee takes seriously our role in overseeing the budget and policies of the Coast Guard and I appreciate your continued engagement with us. I yield back.

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