

Congressman J. Luis Correa (CA-46)
Statement before the House Budget Committee
Member Day Hearing
Thursday, February 27, 2020

Chairman Yarmuth, Ranking Member Womack, and Members of the House Budget Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about certain national security priorities that I believe Congress should consider in Fiscal Year 2021.

The Department of Homeland Security safeguards our nation from threats. I would like to highlight two priorities that I hope the Committee will consider favorably.

To begin, I would urge robust funding levels for the U.S. Coast Guard as it relates to the agency's capabilities to meet its mission in the Arctic region.

As Chairman of the Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee, I have led multiple hearings to discuss our homeland security priorities and interests in the Arctic.

I have repeatedly expressed concern about the aggressive actions of nations like Russia, who have increased their footprint within the Arctic in recent years.

Currently, Russia has a large icebreaker fleet that consists of over 50 icebreakers.

In comparison, the U.S. Coast Guard currently operates two aging polar icebreakers – a heavy polar icebreaker commissioned in 1976 and a medium polar icebreaker commissioned in 2000.

The Coast Guard's limited number of icebreakers impacts its ability to fulfill its missions in the Arctic.

According to Admiral Charles Ray, Coast Guard Vice Commandant, who testified at a Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee hearing earlier this month, our ability to patrol the Arctic depends on the presence of icebreakers in the region.

The Coast Guard has said that it will need six polar security cutters to carry out its Arctic missions.

We need to continue these investments and provide increased funding for the Coast Guard's Procurement, Construction, and Improvement account for the construction of new, modern icebreakers.

Next, I would like to turn to an issue of importance to my district: the National Network of Fusion Centers, which serves a vital role in the information sharing of criminal and terrorist threats.

The National Network consists of 79 state-owned and operated centers, including the Orange County Intelligence Assessment Center.

Established in 2007, OCIAC is nationally recognized, having been named the National Fusion Center of the Year in 2018.

Led by the Orange County Sheriff's Department, OCIAC consists of municipal police agencies, fire agencies and federal law enforcement.

Each year, the OCIAC fields over 1,000 tips or leads on potential threats, which has led to success in addressing threats posed by domestic hate groups, transnational organized crime, and cybercrime.

Funding these fusion centers is critical.

Local agencies rely on Urban Area Security Initiative Funding and State Homeland Security Grant Program funding to maintain their operations.

The President's proposed budget would significantly cut these programs.

This is troubling; Congress must continue funding these programs.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee for your work as this important process moves forward.