

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

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**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION**

**Building a 21st Century Infrastructure for America: Coast Guard Sea, Land, and Air
Capabilities**

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Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Garamendi, and Members of the Committee — thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on such an important topic. This committee has long been one of the greatest champions of the Coast Guard, and the Navy League is very appreciative of your leadership on these important issues. The Navy League, comprised of 50,000 civilians in more than 240 councils around the world, is the foremost citizens' organization to serve, support and stand with all the sea services -- the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and U.S.-flag Merchant Marine – their members and their families

It is an honor and a privilege to be here to today talk about the Coast Guard's capabilities and how they can contribute to the Administration's pledge to invest in American infrastructure. This is a bipartisan priority, and investments in infrastructure, like our ports, maritime highways and navigation systems, historically have been crucial to American prosperity. We are a maritime nation that benefits from global trade and the movement of goods to and from our shores, in and out of our ports, through our inland waterways and ultimately to our homes, is an important part of that economic prosperity. This free and safe movement of goods, so key to our success as a country, is safeguarded by the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard is a unique service with both military and civil responsibilities, as well as humanitarian missions that have accrued through Acts of Congress since the service's founding in 1790. Its extraordinarily broad portfolio of 11 statutory missions serves the nation well. With only 42,000 service members and a budget that averages around \$10 billion, it is already the leanest military service, doing far more to safeguard our national security than its size would suggest. The Coast Guard furthers the nation's priorities and, most importantly, saves lives by the thousands every year. The results they achieve, with so little and so few, reflects the best of the American ethos of hard work and service to others.

The Coast Guard's unique role in safeguarding our national infrastructure includes a wide spectrum of responsibilities, including GPS backup, port security, safety of navigation, coastal homeland security and more. But from the Navy League's perspective, the Coast Guard *itself* is a key part of our integrated infrastructure—part of what makes our national prosperity possible, an organization we would suffer without and one crucial to our homeland security and way of life. The Coast Guard inspects ports, here and abroad, to keep people and goods safe. It fights terrorism off our coasts. It ensures mariners on inland waterways are safe and the waterways are navigable. It protects our maritime sovereignty and borders from illegal activity. It ensures the integrity of our exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and protects the cyber vulnerabilities in our maritime transportation system. The Coast Guard is always there, ensuring the safety and environment for America to thrive. To truly invest in American infrastructure, we must invest in the Coast Guard and its people.

Investment in Coast Guard assets has led to some incredible successes and the recapitalization of its cutter fleet has led to some truly innovative and cutting-edge programs. The National Security Cutters routinely seize drugs in such large quantities that the cutters have paid for themselves and Fast Response Cutters are closing the “patrol gap” the Coast Guard was facing as its fleet aged. The Coast Guard is also developing new cyber teams to help combat terrorism and safeguard our maritime system, which is dependent on GPS and other potentially vulnerable data systems.

Yet, two of the Administration's biggest pledges directly impact the Coast Guard: strengthening our military and investing in our infrastructure. Some of these assets need greater investment to truly build a 21st Century Infrastructure for America. The Navy League recommends: 1) procuring six Fast Response Cutters per year; 2) a steady Acquisition, Construction, and Improvements (AC&I) budget of \$2 billion per year to provide the steady funding the Offshore Patrol Cutter needs; and 3) to fulfill its challenging mission in the Arctic frontier, the Coast Guard needs three heavy and three medium icebreakers, and an additional \$750 million in FY2018 funding to meet the 2020 production goal. The Coast Guard provides the strongest American presence in the Arctic, against a backdrop of increasing Russian activity and safeguarding national security infrastructure in the region. With the Coast Guard as the dominant maritime guardian of the Western Hemisphere, the Navy is able to focus its own thinly-stretched fleet in areas of global concern. The Coast Guard also faces a \$1.6 billion shore infrastructure backlog that is being paid off far too slowly, increasing operational costs and risks. The Coast Guard does much with little, but a real investment in this part of American infrastructure would be beneficial to all Americans.

The proposed presidential budget breaks its promise to this military service, while the Coast Guard is under strain, over-extended and underfunded. This proposal would hamper a service that already operates on a shoestring, with aging vessels and a shore infrastructure so old many facilities are now historical landmarks. The Coast Guard also suffers from the same readiness crisis facing our other military services. A lack of people, maintenance funding, and dollars for such basic needs as fuel has put the service under constant stress, with a disproportionate effect on the men and women of the Coast Guard. Congress has been supportive of the Coast Guard's acquisition needs by keeping its recapitalization program on track. This Committee especially understands the Coast Guard's need to build new cutters and icebreakers. Unfortunately, the operational funds needed to keep pace with the recapitalization have remained flat. Without investing in operational funds for things like fuel, spares, training and manning, these cutting-edge technological marvels will be underused—a waste of the wise investments your committee has made.

To fully fund these operational costs under a flat-lined operations budget, the Coast Guard has had to make reductions elsewhere, ones that affect its people. This committee knows better than most that the Coast Guard will endure numerous sacrifices on behalf of our country, and its people are beginning to pay that price. The Coast Guard, by its very nature, will put mission operations before all else, without complaint—but we are seeing the impacts reduced operational funds is having. Navy League councils in the field have heard the stories of unit galleys and child development centers closing. We know about reductions in training centers and tuition assistance, the cancellation of the educational services officer program, reductions in medical benefits, and fewer Tricare medical advisors and health promotion coordinators. Individually, these are sufficient to cause anyone to rethink their service—but they add up. At a time when the Coast Guards needs to grow by 5,000 people and pilot retention is a constant challenge across the military, the Coast Guard needs to invest in its people through programs like these, but is forced to make these difficult trade-offs to ensure mission execution.

Consider what the Coast Guard does in a single, average day, on this small budget: conducting 45 search and recues cases, saving 14 lives, assisting 66 people in distress, seizing 1,214 pounds of cocaine and 144 pounds of marijuana, conducting 40 waterborne patrols of critical maritime infrastructure, screening 329 merchant vessels for security threats prior to arrival in U.S. ports, and facilitating the movement of \$12.6 billion worth of goods and commodities the our maritime transportation system. Imagine what they could do with full funding.

Budgets are not just numbers. These tradeoffs the Coast Guard is forced to make hurts real people, people like Aviation Survival Technician 2nd Class Darren Harrity, a rescue swimmer who, after a hoisting mechanism malfunctioned during a search-and-rescue operation in 2015, had to swim four trips to pull four men 250 yards to shore in 57-degree water, five-foot waves and 30-mph winds in the dark of night. We need to keep people like Darren Harrity focused, trained, and ready for when we need them. We need people like Darren to have access to the best, most capable, and most dependable cutters and aircraft.

The Navy League would like to thank this Committee for its leadership, and thank Congress for being supportive of the Coast Guard in ensuring they have the resources they need. We are very lucky that this Congress, and especially this committee, has shown such incredible bipartisan leadership in championing this underfunded and vitally important service—a true part of American infrastructure and the backbone of the American way of life.