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United States Coast Guard

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TESTIMONY OF
VICE ADMIRAL PAUL F. THOMAS
DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT
ON

"U.S. COAST GUARD RECAPITALIZATION PROGRAMS"

BEFORE THE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

JULY 27, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for your continued oversight and strong support of the Coast Guard. I am honored to appear before you today to update you on our ongoing efforts to recapitalize our aging surface and aviation fleets; Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C5ISR) systems; and shore infrastructure.

We have never experienced a greater demand for Coast Guard services, and we anticipate this demand to grow in the future. We are focused on delivering capabilities to meet these demands and confront the dynamic and complex challenges that our Coast Guard men and women face. New and more capable Coast Guard cutters, aircraft, boats, and C5ISR systems support mission execution domestically and in some of the most challenging environments around the world, including the Polar Regions, Indo-Pacific, and Persian Gulf.

Our Commandant has spoken about the need to adapt to the ever-increasing pace of change and provide our Coast Guard men and women with modern assets, systems, and infrastructure to support mission execution. In line with this direction, the Service continues to invest in acquisition programs that provide the assets and capabilities the Service needs to execute our missions world-wide. Additionally, the Coast Guard continues to prioritize investments in our shore infrastructure, where every mission begins and ends: the facilities, piers, runways, and buildings, which are as necessary for operations as our ships, boats, aircraft, and C5ISR systems.

Indeed, recapitalization remains a top priority for the Commandant and the Service, and today's efforts to invest in tomorrow's needs will shape the Coast Guard and impact national security for decades. This Subcommittee's continued support has helped us make tremendous progress, and it is that critical we field assets that improve mission execution and deliver the capabilities the Nation needs. Simply put, we must act today to be prepared for tomorrow.

THE COAST GUARD ACQUISITION ENTERPRISE

As the Chief Mission Support Officer of the Coast Guard, I lead a talented team of professionals dedicated to building and maintaining a modern force of assets, infrastructure, and systems that meet the needs of the Service. Acquisitions require executable strategy which considers the need to plan and scope acquisitions before work begins; to oversee the design and production processes; and to prepare future crews and the maintenance community for the delivery and future operation of new capabilities.

To bolster acquisition oversight, the Coast Guard developed an acquisition governance structure, pursued continued refinement of that structure, strengthened processes, institutionalized the roles of our technical authorities, and focused on recruiting and retaining a highly capable and trained acquisition workforce. We continue to implement initiatives to minimize acquisition risks and maximize affordability within our programs. We leverage the experience and expertise of our partners to perform key functions and guide Coast Guard decision-makers throughout the acquisition life cycle.

STATUS OF KEY ACQUISITION EFFORTS

The Coast Guard continues to make progress in our efforts to recapitalize the Coast Guard fleet and support systems. The Service is taking delivery of new cutters, aviation assets, boats, C5ISR capabilities, and upgraded shore infrastructure and investing in critical mission-enabling service life extensions, major maintenance, and key upgrades of the legacy surface and aviation fleet to enhance mission readiness and performance.

Surface Programs:

With the strong support of this Subcommittee, we are moving forward with the acquisition of the Nation's first new heavy polar icebreakers in over four decades. Polar Security Cutter (PSC) design activities are ongoing, and initial long lead-time material has been delivered to the shipyard. Recognizing the critical need for these assets, the Service is working closely with the prime contractor to mitigate schedule risks and ensure production readiness. When fully operational, PSCs will provide the global reach and icebreaking capability necessary to project U.S. sovereignty and influence, conduct Coast Guard missions in the high latitudes, and advance our national interests in the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

The Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC) remains a top acquisition priority for the Service and is vital to recapitalizing the capability provided by our legacy fleet of 210-foot and 270-foot Medium Endurance Cutters (MEC). The program is progressing, with production of OPCs 1-4 underway with the Stage 1 contractor. Additionally, the Service is continuing with design activities on the Stage 2 contract, which will lead to the future production of up to 11 additional OPCs. As a bridging strategy to maintain mission capabilities until the OPCs are delivered, the Coast Guard has undertaken a service life extension program (SLEP) that will address key systems and component obsolescence on board the MECs, many of which already exceed 50 years in service.

On October 5, 2022, the Coast Guard awarded the Waterways Commerce Cutter (WCC) contract for the design and future production of the river buoy tender and inland construction tender variants. The contract includes options for production of up to 27 cutters, and a separate effort is planned to deliver three inland buoy tenders to achieve a total fleet of 30 WCCs.

The prime contractor began design activities earlier this year. Investment in our inland fleet is critical to the continued operation of the Nation's Marine Transportation System, which accounts for more than $4 trillion in annual economic activity. The legacy fleet is approaching obsolescence, maintenance costs are rising, and the vast majority of these cutters do not support mixed-gender berthing. Continued progress toward delivering these new assets and replacing the legacy fleet, which has an average age of over 55 years, is critical to maintaining the Coast Guard's capability to execute this important mission.

The Service continues to deliver National Security Cutters (NSC) and Fast Response Cutters (FRC) to the fleet, providing game changing capabilities to operational commanders and supporting expanded mission demands around the globe. The Coast Guard plans to take delivery of NSC 10, CGC *Calhoun*, later this year and has commissioned 52 FRCs into service (out of a program of record of 65 cutters).

In concert with our efforts to acquire new assets, we are also focused on sustaining and improving our existing fleet through the In-Service Vessel Sustainment (ISVS) program. In recent years, the Coast Guard has completed the SLEP for the 140-foot icebreaking tug class and Coast Guard Cutter *Eagle* at the Coast Guard Yard in Curtis Bay, Maryland. The Service is approaching the completion of Major Maintenance Availability activities for the 225-foot seagoing buoy tenders; the last cutter is scheduled to leave the Coast Guard Yard in early 2024. After initiating two prototypes of a 270-foot MEC SLEP, industrial work on production began earlier this month.

In addition, the ISVS program is overseeing continued SLEP work on Coast Guard Cutter *Polar Star*, the Service's only operational heavy polar icebreaker. The cutter recently began the third of five planned annual work periods to enable continued operation of the aging cutter and availability for the annual breakout of national facilities in Antarctica's McMurdo Sound.

The Coast Guard is also making investments across the boat fleet, producing the next generation of cutter boats to enhance interdiction capabilities of parent cutters. Additionally, the Service initiated efforts to recapitalize the 52-foot heavy weather boat, a special purpose craft, and achieved Acquisition Decision Event One in April. The Coast Guard is also performing SLEP activities to extend the useful service life of the Service's 47-foot motor lifeboats by replacing obsolete, unsupportable, or maintenance-intensive equipment, and standardizing configuration across the fleet.

Aviation Programs:

The Service began production of new MH-60 hull components in March 2023 to support the ongoing SLEP and continued transition of the rotary-wing fleets to a single airframe. When combined with structural fitting and dynamic component replacements through the SLEP, the new hulls will extend the service life of the Coast Guard's vertical lift capability into the 2040s. Service life extension work also continues on the H-65 fleet, including critical avionics upgrades. Nearly 70 upgraded MH-65Es are performing operations at 11 Coast Guard air stations across the Nation.

Acquisition of new C-130J airframes and missionization of the fixed-wing fleet (comprised of HC-130J long range surveillance aircraft and HC-27J/HC-144B medium range surveillance aircraft) are significantly enhancing the Coast Guard's capabilities to conduct airborne surveillance, detection, classification, and identification of vessels and other aircraft missions in coordination with the surface fleet and shoreside facilities.

The Coast Guard is delivering standardized missionization packages based on the U.S. Navy's Minotaur Mission System Suite that improve system performance, address obsolescence concerns, improve cyber security of the mission system, and increase compatibility with Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security assets and systems.

Additionally, the Coast Guard continues to leverage the use of unmanned aircraft system (UAS) capabilities to support the surveillance and maritime domain awareness capabilities of the NSC fleet. All nine operational NSCs have been equipped with UAS infrastructure and equipment and routinely deploy with UAS capabilities as part of the cutter's total force package.

C5ISR and Information Technology Programs:

The Coast Guard is acquiring C5ISR and Information Technology (IT) systems that enhance the mission capabilities of new and recapitalized Coast Guard assets to operate in challenging environments. The systems provide standardized capability to major cutters and aircraft, enabling assets to receive, evaluate and act upon information, and facilitate interoperability and information sharing inside and outside the Coast Guard. IT efforts like the Coast Guard Logistics Information Management System (CG-LIMS) acquisition program and Cyber and Enterprise Mission Platform address needs to replace and modernize obsolete support systems to improve mission readiness and operational effectiveness.

Shore Infrastructure:

As the Commandant noted in her testimony before the Subcommittee, shore facility maintenance and recapitalization are critical to mission success. New, more capable assets must be paired with investments in our infrastructure needs. With the support of this Subcommittee and others, we are making progress towards addressing the extensive backlog of shoreside infrastructure projects. The Coast Guard is committed to taking a leading-edge approach to project planning and execution to ensure the Service has the modern and resilient infrastructure required to meet the operational demands of today and tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

Since 1790, the Coast Guard has safeguarded our Nation's maritime interests and natural resources on our rivers, in our ports, on the high seas, and around the world. Each day, the Coast Guard carries out its missions to protect lives, protect the environment, secure our maritime borders, and facilitate commerce. Our mission support and acquisition enterprises are, likewise, working each day to plan and deliver the assets and capabilities needed to support these critical missions.

The cutters, aircraft, boats, C5ISR systems, and shoreside infrastructure we acquire today will provide vital capability for decades to come. We are committed to maximizing the Nation's return on these important investments. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for all you do for the women and men of the U.S. Coast Guard. I look forward to answering your questions.