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Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



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**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

**U. S. COAST GUARD**

**STATEMENT OF**

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**ON THE**

**COAST GUARD FISCAL YEAR 2009 BUDGET REQUEST**

**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**FEBRUARY 26, 2008**

## INTRODUCTION

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. I am the Coast Guard's senior enlisted member and am honored to be here to discuss our fiscal year 2009 budget request. I serve alongside the most capable and dedicated workforce in the U.S. Government and am pleased to discuss their needs and other Coast Guard priorities with your Committee today.

## WORKFORCE COURAGE, SACRIFICE AND COMMITMENT

The U. S. Coast Guard is responsible for protecting the Nation against a wide array of threats and vulnerabilities. We take these responsibilities very seriously. Our Commandant, Admiral Thad Allen, is committed to ensuring that Coast Guard personnel are the best trained and most versatile workforce in government; equipped with the most capable fleet of multi-mission ships, aircraft, boats and command and control systems available.

I am very proud of the accomplishments of our service members. On behalf of the over 49,000 men and women who make up Active and Reserve components of the Coast Guard, I would like to thank Congress for their support and continued efforts to help us position America's Coast Guard to answer the call, to execute the mission, and to be *Semper Paratus*.

The events of the last few years have forced our Nation to become more vigilant. Every minute of every day, members of the Coast Guard are on watch 24/7 around on the globe. To operate the boats, ships, and aircraft necessary to execute the mission, to be able to respond to all threats, all hazards, in all environments, we must focus on our People.

The Coast Guard performed exceptionally during 2007 as in previous years. Last year the men and women of the Coast Guard celebrated over one million lives since 1790. We responded to over 27,000 search and rescue cases and saved over 5,000 lives. We seized over 350,000 pounds of cocaine – with an estimated street value of \$4.7 billion dollars. The Coast Guard shined for America every day. At any given time, Coast Guard members may be rescuing victims trapped in the most harrowing of circumstances, inspecting commercial ships for safety of operation on the high seas, preparing community volunteers to assist with future response efforts or boarding vessels suspected of illicit activity.

The personnel performing our Coast Guard missions did so in extraordinarily demanding conditions. Our men and women performed with courage, sacrifice, and dignity and are eager to answer the Nation's call now and into the future. Over the course of the last year I have personally visited thousands of Coast Guardsmen all over the world and know firsthand what they do. I would like to share with you three examples of Coast Guardsmen placed in extraordinary circumstance. Their individual responses to each situation were exemplary. In our workforce, the quality of these individuals is the rule rather than the exception. Here are some examples of workforce heroism:

Petty Officer Wil Milam demonstrated extraordinary bravery as part of a Coast Guard helicopter crew working out of Dutch Harbor, Alaska. Upon receiving word that a fishing vessel was in distress, the crew launched despite winds gusting up to 35 knots and obscured visibility. Arriving on scene the helicopter crew located a life raft that was holding 4 terrified survivors. As

the rescue swimmer, Petty Officer Milam was deployed into the 15 foot seas. The rescue took two sorties due to a rupture in Petty Officer Milam's dry suit that allowed the frigid arctic seawater to enter. Experiencing exhaustion and hypothermic conditions himself, Petty Officer Milam persevered and rescued all four persons from certain death.

Master Chief Mike Leavitt displayed extraordinary heroism while facing 20-foot crashing waves to rescue a man who had been swept off a jetty in Humboldt Bay California. Master Chief Leavitt displayed leadership and courage under the most harrowing circumstances. During the course of the rescue operation, an ocean wave broke with such force that it ripped a full-face helmet completely off of his head. Master Chief Leavitt and his team continued the rescue and recovered the victim. That person is alive today because of Master Chief Leavitt and his team's courage and perseverance.

Petty Officer James Huddleston, on temporary assignment to the Atlantic Area Redeployment Assistance and Inspection Detachment in Iraq, displayed gallantry under fire during a mortar attack. Enemy rounds landed within yards of Petty Officer Huddleston, killing and wounding soldiers in the area. He miraculously escaped injury and immediately sprang into action to render aid and comfort to fellow warriors after the attack.

During 2007, over 800 Coast Guard active and reserve personnel deployed around the world in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Our continued deployment of six 110' patrol boats, two law enforcement detachments, and supporting personnel bolstered the ability of the naval component commander in the Arabian Gulf to secure the sea lanes, prosecute terrorism at sea, train Iraqi naval forces and protect Iraq's vital off-shore oil infrastructure.

Eight Coast Guard Health Services Technicians deployed as members of a joint military – civilian medical staff on the USNS COMFORT for a 120-day humanitarian mission to provide medical care to communities in 12 Latin American countries where medical care is in short supply or only available for affluent citizens.

These are just a few of many examples of the selfless dedication of the Coast Guard workforce. Here are their needs in the future.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

The Coast Guard fleet is the 37th oldest fleet of 39 similar fleets in the world. As a priority, we need to replace aging vessels, aircraft and shore infrastructure as quickly as possible. The cost of maintaining and operating outdated assets is continually increasing, as are major unplanned maintenance evolutions and reductions in readiness. Vital shore infrastructure required to maintain our front line assets is also in critical need of renovation, repair and/or replacement. Ultimately, the future operational success of the Coast Guard is dependent upon a comprehensive recapitalization of front line operational assets and shore/support infrastructure.

Legacy cutter sustainment is a continuing challenge of particular importance to me. Beyond the need for system upgrades that will improve mission performance, our cutters need to be sustained for the sake of our people. Coast Guardsmen spend on average 185-days away from homeport every year. For the period that they are assigned to these cutters they spend over half

their lives living aboard. From a quality of life perspective, living areas onboard these ships must be maintained at least to the standard to which they were built. Space will necessarily be limited in a legacy cutter's 30-person berthing area, and these cutters will never match the six-person berthing areas of the new National Security Cutter, but we must at a minimum continue to provide a safe, clean environment for our people to live in. As these cutters age, this is becoming more of a challenge and will require additional funding in years to come.

Shore side infrastructure is also critically important to workforce quality of life. At work and on duty our people live and spend significant portions of their lives in our shore structures. During one unit visit in an aging facility the crew showed me a shop-room where a 6-foot geyser regularly shoots up from a floor drain after a hard rain. Such situations are all too common, as we attempt to keep our aging infrastructure operational with insufficient funds.

The Coast Guard is currently overseeing construction of cutters BERTHOLF (WMSL 750) and WAESCHE (WMSL 751), the first two National Security Cutters of the Integrated Deepwater System (IDS) acquisition program and the first new high endurance cutters in over 35 years. These cutters will meet the Coast Guard's multi-mission responsibilities in homeland security, national defense, marine safety, and environmental protection, and will strengthen operational readiness, capacity and effectiveness. Six-person state rooms, a state of the art mess deck, and an actual onboard gym are just a few of the features that will increase quality of life for our crews and provide stark contrast to the conditions on our legacy cutters. They are equipped with an aft launch and recovery area for two rigid hull inflatable boats; an expansive flight deck able to accommodate a range of aircraft; and state-of-the-art command and control systems. In December, BERTHOLF successfully completed its first sea trial and is well on its way to becoming a member of our fleet.

Your continued support of the IDS program is vital to the success of the modernization of the Coast Guard fleet and the well-being of our people.

### CHILD CARE

In July 2006, we took an important step forward in establishing a partnership with the General Services Administration (GSA) to make childcare more affordable for Coast Guard families. This partnership was created to assist members with locating state-licensed, center-based or home-based child care facilities. Additionally, a tuition assistance program providing up to \$4,500 per child per year became available to qualifying personnel for child care services received at commercial child care facilities nationwide. From July 2006 to the present, over 600 additional children have been enrolled in the child care subsidy program, and 550 Coast Guard families have received childcare subsidy benefits. Moving forward, we are working to expand our subsidy program and increase childcare access. This is especially important in remote areas where DoD or other government facilities may not be available.

### HEALTHCARE

The Coast Guard's unique mission set often requires assignment to geographically remote locations. Approximately 50% of our members and their families are more than 50 miles from the nearest DoD Military Treatment Facility (MTF). These members and their families must rely upon the TRICARE provider network or more specifically, TRICARE Prime Remote. Unavailability of a MTF usually means no established TRICARE network. Moreover, due to the nature of our missions, our members are often assigned to high cost resort areas. In these areas,

many haven't been able to locate TRICARE participating providers simply because the providers are reluctant to accept the low TRICARE reimbursement rate. DoD and TRICARE managers are aware of these issues and are working to address them. We have made significant progress with TRICARE over the past few years and with your continued support we hope to ensure that this positive trend continues.

Available healthcare is one of the most important issues affecting Coast Guard families today. Military healthcare is the cornerstone of our quality of life benefit system, and one that is critical to beneficiaries.

## HOUSING

As I have testified before, housing remains a major concern for our workforce. Providing our members the opportunity for suitable, affordable and safe housing directly impacts mission readiness. A member should not have to be concerned for the safety of their family while they're on a mission. The state of Coast Guard owned housing is of particular interest and concern to me. The vast majority of Coast Guard personnel collect Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) and reside in private sector housing. However, there are some locations where private sector housing is insufficient to meet our requirements and it is necessary for the Coast Guard to provide housing.

Currently, the Coast Guard owns approximately 4,400 family houses and 227 unaccompanied personnel housing (UPH or barracks) facilities. The average age of Coast Guard housing is 40+ years, and we have a maintenance and recapitalization backlog in excess of \$400 million for these housing projects. Examples of our aging inventory include 200 family homes in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and a 200 room Unaccompanied Personnel Housing (UPH) facility located in Staten Island, New York, both of which are inadequate for our current needs.

The Coast Guard needs to maintain housing in both locations, and the improvement projects will remain priorities. Inattention to our family and unaccompanied housing units will ultimately lead to health, safety and morale concerns that are unacceptable to our members and their families.

As an example, we recently started a rehabilitation project to repair the problems at the UPH in New York. These housing issues are an indicative subset of the aging shore facility infrastructure throughout the Coast Guard.

On a more positive note, the Coast Guard will begin construction on new housing in Cordova, Alaska this summer. This is a phased project, so with your support in FY09, the project in Cordova will continue. I also seek your support for a critical housing project for Coast Guard Station Montauk, New York, that will allow the Coast Guard to acquire homes in an extremely tight housing market on eastern Long Island. Both projects will solve housing needs in their respective locations that cannot be solved through other methods. Your support of these projects will allow us to take care of Coast Guard locations in dire need of new or recapitalized housing.

The Coast Guard considered entering into two public-private venture (PPV) projects in Alaska and New Jersey. However, due to Congressional Budget Office (CBO) scoring practices, the Coast Guard decided not to pursue these projects. Specifically, the CBO scoring would require the Coast Guard to obligate the full cost of these projects as new budget authority at the time of the lease agreements. This made the ability to execute PPV projects cost prohibitive and was a major setback for Coast Guard housing. We are now forced to rely on traditional funding resources which are extremely limited and must be competed against other priority operational projects. We are committed to seeking and implementing alternative solutions to improve the state of housing for our personnel. It is a top priority and we seek your support to improve the quality of Coast Guard housing.

Additionally, your continued support of annual BAH increases has positively impacted the vast majority of our personnel. Sufficient housing allowances permit our members to obtain housing within the local economy which, in turn, reduces the need for Coast Guard-owned housing. Of course, this only benefits those people who are assigned to areas with adequate private sector housing.

In areas where there is a shortage of both private and government housing (e.g. remote or resort areas), the Coast Guard declares the area a Critical Housing Area (CHA). This allows members the choice to move their family to their new duty station and try to find housing, or, leave their family where housing and support are available to them without affecting their housing allowance. The Coast Guard currently has 22 locations declared as CHAs; we also honor the 4 areas declared a CHA by the Navy.

### LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

I mentioned last year that our Leadership Advisory Council (LAC) had identified Leadership and Management Training school (LAMS) as essential to standardizing leadership training for members preparing to assume supervisory positions. I am pleased to announce inclusion of LAMS as a performance-based requirement for advancement to First Class Petty Officer (E-6). Investing time in our people and developing our future leaders is always the right thing to do. To help our organization modernize, we must adopt a comprehensive approach to developing leaders that fully acknowledges the significance of effective leadership in attaining mission success. Successful completion of LAMS is the first step. Developing these skills in all Coast Guard personnel will result in the continuous improvement necessary for us to remain ready for all threats and all hazards.

### RECRUITING

Only 28% of the general population is eligible to be recruited for military service. Despite this and despite the increased operational and personnel tempos by all components of our Service, our recruiters continued to enlist young people attracted by our missions. The Coast Guard succeeds through the courage, devotion and sacrifice of our people. Our Service members epitomize the Coast Guard's core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty in words and deeds. We have over 370 dedicated individuals assigned to our recruiting offices; the key to mission execution begins here.

FY07 was an impressive year. Coast Guard recruiters attained 100% of the active duty enlisted requirement and, for the first time in our history, met the enlisted Reserve mission requirement as well. More than 29,000 citizens applied for approximately 4,000 positions. We also continued to excel at diversifying our workforce. We achieved the second highest percentage of active duty minority accessions (35.7%) in the history of the Coast Guard. Recruiting can be a difficult and sometimes thankless task. Our recruiters are doing a superb job and are more than meeting the challenge.

### RETENTION

Not only are we recruiting a quality workforce, but more importantly we are retaining a quality, diverse workforce. Overall current retention rates within our officer and enlisted communities are 93 and 88.7%, respectively. As a public service organization, it is essential that we retain a workforce that reflects the changing face of our country. By continuing to increase diversity we improve our mission performance, enhance our ability to communicate effectively with the public and spark innovation. We are committed to remaining an “Employer of Choice” for our people and their families and for those considering making the Coast Guard a career.

### EDUCATION BENEFITS AND SPOUSAL EMPLOYMENT

During the 2008 State of the Union Address, President Bush mentioned a potential expansion of education benefits, along with a new hiring preference authorization for spouses. These are issues of great concern to Coast Guard families. At almost every “all-hands” meeting I hold at units the question of Montgomery G.I. Bill benefit “transferability” is asked. The ability to transfer the benefit to spouses and children would be considered a huge step forward for our family’s welfare. In addition, like all military spouses, the unemployment rate of Coast Guard spouses is higher than the general population. Frequent Permanent Change of Station moves often prevent laying down the community roots necessary to obtain good jobs. The Federal government hiring preference would be a major step forward.

### CONCLUSION

Coast Guard personnel are doing more than we’ve ever asked them to do in more places than we’ve ever asked them to go. By asking more of them, we are asking more of their families. We must continue to support the programs and initiatives we presently have in place, and they must continue to evolve as the needs of our families change.

The Coast Guard is populated with anonymous every day heroes. Ordinary people who through foresight, circumstance, determination, innovation or seized opportunity, do extraordinary things in pursuit of a cause beyond themselves. Some make the headlines – most don’t. They all have one thing in common – on a daily basis they get the job done no matter the sacrifice. It takes a special kind of person to wear the uniform of the United States Coast Guard. With honor, respect and devotion to duty they are ALWAYS READY to answer the call.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for all that you do for the men and women of the Coast Guard. I look forward to your questions.