

U. S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF THE

MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD

CHARLES W. BOWEN

ON THE

FISCAL YEAR 2010 BUDGET REQUEST

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 13, 2009

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today.

As America's Maritime Guardians, the United States Coast Guard is responsible for the Nation's maritime safety and security. We save lives. We defend the homeland. We protect the environment. These are responsibilities we take very seriously. Our Commandant, Admiral Thad Allen, is dedicated to mission execution and committed to ensuring that Coast Guard men and women are equipped with the most capable fleet of multi-mission ships, aircraft, and boats available in order to complete the mission at hand.

2008 was another exceptional year in terms of mission performance for the U.S. Coast Guard. Every task completed by the men and women of our service is in direct support of one of our fundamental roles. It is our job to protect our borders, safeguard our infrastructure, and improve our Nation's abilities to prevent, respond to, and recover from natural and manmade hazards. Whether conducting security operations in the Arabian Gulf, interdicting illegal drugs in the Caribbean, or inspecting vessels and facilities in our domestic ports, the men and women of the Coast Guard ensured 2008 was a year like no other. We responded to over 24,000 search and rescue cases and saved over 4,000 lives. We seized over 167 metric tons of cocaine that was headed for the United States, conducted more than 28,000 small vessel security boardings, and interdicted nearly 5,000 migrants on the high seas. We also continued supporting Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

The personnel performing our Coast Guard missions did so in demanding conditions. Over the course of the last year I visited thousands of Coast Guardsmen all over the world and know firsthand what they do. We are a service of everyday heroes whose daring rescues are the stuff of legend. Their individual responses to each situation are amazing. However, for every Guardian who performs a harrowing rescue there are hundreds of others that execute missions that are of equal importance. Here are just a few examples of the selfless dedication of the Coast Guard workforce.

Petty Officer Laura Smith, a Health Services Technician, volunteered to deploy onboard USS KEARSAGE to augment their medical staff for the duration of Operation Continuing Promise. She filled nearly 4,000 prescriptions and ensured proper patient education that greatly enhanced mission effectiveness as part of a humanitarian and civic assistance mission that brought health care and other relief services to eight Latin American and Caribbean nations. During the deployment USS KEARSAGE was diverted to provide emergency assistance to the citizens of Haiti after that island nation was devastated by Hurricane Gustav.

Petty Officer Aaron Harvey, a Rescue Swimmer, was assigned to a helicopter crew that responded to the deadly crash of an oil rig supply helicopter in a swamp southwest of New Orleans. Once on scene, Petty Officer Harvey had to perform the somber task of retrieving the bodies of eight victims from the wreckage. Although physically sick from being soaked with jet fuel and dealing with the carnage he had witnessed, he was able to summon the inner strength necessary to re-enter the wreckage to locate and rescue the lone survivor.

As part Operation Assured Delivery the crew of Coast Guard Cutter DALLAS provided urgently needed humanitarian relief to the people of the Republic of Georgia. They offloaded over 76,000 pounds of supplies including food, water, bedding and medical supplies.

At three o'clock in the morning on Easter Sunday, the Coast Guard received a distress call from the fishing vessel ALASKA RANGER, a 200-foot catcher-processor saying that it was taking on water. Minutes later he radioed that 47 crewmembers were abandoning ship into the frigid water of the Bering Sea. Over the next several hours one of the most dramatic rescues in modern Coast Guard history unfolded. Working in 20-foot seas in the pre-dawn darkness Petty Officer Second Class Obrien Hollow pulled 13 survivors into the first helicopter - completely filling its spaces. The second smaller helicopter that had been launched from the wildly pitching decks of the Coast Guard Cutter MUNRO, arrived on scene and Petty Officer Third Class Abram Heller hoisted another three survivors. Needing to return to MUNRO because it was running low on fuel, the crew made the decision to deploy its own life-raft, leaving Petty Officer Heller alone with three remaining fishermen. After offloading the survivors onto the MUNRO, the first helicopter returned to retrieve Petty Officer Heller and hoist the fishermen to safety. Through the training, determination and courage of the crew of the cutter MUNRO, two helicopters and the timely assistance of the ALASKA WARRIOR, 42 people were saved from certain death

During 2008 U. S. Coast Guard active and reserve personnel continued to deploy around the world in support of our country's defense. Currently we have two Port Security Units deployed to both Guantanamo Bay and Kuwait. Our six 110' patrol boats, two law enforcement detachments and supporting personnel bolster 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.

The Coast Guard recently adopted a service wide Ethos. Along with our core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty, the Ethos provides a constant reminder to our people of the noble calling of our service, the reasons why we serve, and the critical importance of our missions.

The Guardian Ethos

I am America's Maritime Guardian
I serve the citizens of the United States
I will protect them
I will defend them
I will save them
I am their shield
For them I am Semper Paratus
I live the Coast Guard core values
We are the United States Coast Guard

A few months ago I attended a memorial service held at Coast Guard Air Station Barbers Point for the crew of Coast Guard helicopter 6505. The helicopter crashed offshore of Honolulu Hawaii September 4th of last year. All four crewmembers lost their lives, Captain Thomas Nelson, Lieutenant Commander Andrew Wischmier, AST1 Dave Skimin and AMT2 Joshua Nichols. As I talked to their families and listened to the words of those who knew them at the memorial service, I thought about the Guardian Ethos. Our members are now required to memorize these words in recruit training. Shortly after Honolulu based Coast Guard Cutter AHI got underway for a search and rescue mission they were notified it was a downed CG Helo. There is nothing more devastating then searching for your own. Their newest Guardian almost straight from recruit training started reciting the Guardian Ethos as the rest of the crew joined in. I thought about why the crew did that. The Ethos is, Who we are... Why we serve....and Why the crew of CG6505 and countless others before them have sacrificed.

Now I would like to shift the focus to address a number of quality of life issues that are vital to the morale and well being of our members.

HOUSING

The state of Coast Guard owned housing continues to be a major issue for me. The vast majority of Coast Guard personnel reside in private sector housing; however, there are some locations where private sector housing is insufficient and it is necessary for the Coast Guard to provide housing. Currently, the Coast Guard owns approximately 4,350 family houses and 227 unaccompanied personnel housing (UPH or barracks) facilities. The average age of Coast Guard housing is 45+ years, and we have an excessive maintenance and recapitalization backlog. We are leaving over 12,000 members and families living in aged houses, some of which are substandard. These houses are expensive to maintain, and have frequent maintenance issues. Several years ago the entire Coast Guard owned housing program was evaluated, and the inventory was reduced to include only those areas/houses absolutely critical to Coast Guard families.

Examples of our aging inventory include 200 family homes in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and our largest 200 room UPH facility located in Staten Island, New York. Both of these are inadequate for our current needs due to the amount of outstanding maintenance. The Coast Guard needs to maintain housing in both locations, and the improvement projects will remain a priority until funding becomes available. The rehabilitation project to repair the problems at the UPH in New York is well underway and is making progress; however, these housing issues are an indicative subset of the aging shore facility infrastructure throughout the Coast Guard.

Due to the very nature of our missions, the Coast Guard often requires its members to reside in remote areas that may not have adequate housing to support our needs. What compounds this matter is that many of these remote locations are also home to some of the country's mostly highly sought resort areas and therefore the available housing is often prohibitively expensive. In those areas where housing is particularly inaccessible, the Coast Guard declares them Critical Housing Areas (CHA). This allows members the choice to move their family to the new duty station and find housing or leave their family behind without negatively impacting their housing allowance. The Coast Guard currently has twenty four locations declared as CHAs as well as five areas designated by the Navy.

The challenging economy we're facing places extra attention on this important work-life matter and we appreciate the inclusion of the Homeowners Assistance Program in the recent economic stimulus law. This program provides help to military homeowners who receive PCS orders and are unable to sell their homes.

We are also grateful for your continued support of annual basic allowance for housing (BAH). Adequate BAH permits our members to obtain housing on the local economy which, in turn, reduces the need for Coast Guard owned and leased housing.

On a more positive note, with your support, the Coast Guard will begin construction on one of the last phases of new housing construction in Cordova, Alaska this summer and begin a housing project for Coast Guard Station Montauk, New York. These projects 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 otherwise solved. We are also in the final stages of the largest GSA Relocation project ever undertaken for the Coast Guard. The

Coast Guard leveraged \$10 million from excess housing units in Miami, FL through a GSA managed sale and directed the capital toward a new housing mission that supports Coast Guard forces in Marathon, FL. We expect the construction to be complete in FY 2010.

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 of future legislation to improve the quality of Coast Guard housing.

The U. S. Coast Guard is the nation's premier life-saving service, but our fleet is the 22nd oldest fleet of 22 similar fleets in the world. The cost of maintaining and operating our Legacy cutters is a continuing challenge that is of particular importance to me. An enormous amount of time, energy, manpower and money goes into sustaining assets that are years – and in some case decades - past their designed service lives. The men and women of the United States Coast Guard are doing more than we've ever asked them to do in more places than we've ever asked them to go. It is our responsibility to provide them with safe, reliable platforms. Scheduled patrols are often times followed by an unscheduled maintenance period which comes at the expense of mission execution. Our presence in the maritime domain corresponds to our fleet readiness. What all this means is that in order to keep our fleet in an acceptable operating condition we are asking our people to work harder. It is important to emphasize that these aging assets are also where we ask our people to live. A Guardian assigned to a cutter will spend an average of 185 days a year away from homeport. Our cutters need to be sustained for the sake of the quality of life for our people. As these cutters continue to age, it is becoming more and more of a challenge to simply provide a safe, clean environment for our people to live in.

Shore side infrastructure is also important to our people's quality of life. We must provide our people with safe and secure buildings from which to operate and maintain our assets. There are many that are in critical need of renovation and repair and, in some cases, not safe. We must make sure that these critical repairs are assigned the highest priority as we address our maintenance backlog.

There have been successes. We received and commissioned Coast Guard Cutter BERTHOLF, our first Legend-class National Security Cutter, launched the second, USCGC WAESCHE, and began fabrication on the third, USCGC STRATTON. And the contract has been awarded to build the first-of-class of the Fast Response Cutter (FRC), a new generation of Coast Guard patrol boats. The 153-foot Sentinel-class patrol boat will continue the Coast Guard's long history of protecting America's citizens, assets and interests at home and abroad. The FRC will replace the 110-foot Island-class patrol boats, which have reached the end of their 20-year service lives. We also received the first of our newest multi-mission asset: the 45-foot Response Boat – Medium (RBM). The RB-M will help revitalize our shore-based response fleet.

Ultimately, the future operational success of the Coast Guard is dependent upon the ongoing comprehensive recapitalization of front line afloat assets and shore/support infrastructure. Your continued support is vital to the success of the modernization of the Coast Guard and the well-being of our people.

HEALTHCARE

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 our people. The U.S. Coast Guard is unique among the armed services in that our mission set

often dictates that the majority of our workforce is spread out at sometimes very small commands in the most geographically remote locations in the country. Approximately 50 percent of our members and their families are more than one hour from the nearest Department of Defense military treatment facilities (MTF). These members and their families must rely upon the TRICARE provider network or more specifically, TRICARE Prime Remote. This means that not only is there no MTF nearby, but there is often no established TRICARE network. The remote locations that are members are located in are often also high cost resort areas. We have members who have not been able to locate TRICARE participating providers simply because the providers are reluctant to accept the low reimbursement rate that TRICARE offers. 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.

CHILD CARE

Child care is a significant issue for Coast Guard families. Available, affordable and accessible childcare is one of the most important quality of life issues for Coast Guard personnel. As previously stated, due to the locations in which we serve, our people are very often located in remote, high cost areas. High child care costs impact our workforce throughout all geographical areas, but particularly those with no access to Department of Defense (DOD) or Coast Guard child development centers. This makes it difficult, if not impossible to maintain parity with the other armed services in respect to providing our people with quality and affordable child care options.

The Coast Guard child care system supports a much smaller percentage of Coast Guard children than the DOD childcare system. As of the end of December 2008, 1,616 Coast Guard children were enrolled in Coast Guard-sponsored child care services; an increase from 3 percent of all eligible children in FY 2004 to 5.5 percent in FY 2009. By comparison, approximately 14 percent of DoD children under 12 are enrolled in some form of DOD child care (sponsored/subsidized by DOD). Today, there are approximately 29,000 Coast Guard children under the age of 12. Our goal is provide at least the same percentage of children with services, as DOD provides. That would equal approximately 4,035 children.

Our GSA subsidy program has been very popular, and we would like to be able to provide all Coast Guard families seeking child care assistance these subsidies.

RECRUITING

Our mission – saving lives, enforcing the law, protecting the environment and defending our nation – attracts bright, talented people. We have over 360 dedicated individuals assigned to our recruiting offices nationwide. The key to mission execution begins here. Despite the fact that less than 30 percent of the general population is eligible to be recruited for military service, our recruiters continue to find young people attracted by our missions.

Fiscal year 2008 was an impressive year not only for meeting 100 percent of our active duty recruiting targets with highly qualified recruits, but we continued to excel at diversifying our workforce. We achieved the second highest percentage of active duty minority accessions (36.0 percent) in the history of our service. Recruiting is one of the most demanding and rewarding jobs we ask our people to do. Our recruiters are doing a superb job and are more than meeting the challenge to make our Coast Guard the best it can be.

RETENTION

Not only are we recruiting a quality workforce, but more importantly we are retaining a quality workforce. The current retention rates within our officer and enlisted communities are 93.3 percent and 89.7 percent, respectively. Our recruiters are finding and recruiting high quality people and our service has become a “service of choice”. But just as importantly, 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. Last Winter I was underway on one of our large cutters operating in the straights of Florida. If that crew had not had a diverse workforce onboard who understood different languages and cultures their mission effectiveness would have been degraded as they tried to take care of the over 100 Cuban migrants they had interdicted and rescued at sea.

TRAINING

The U.S. Coast Guard is a multi-mission, maritime force. We are a major element of the nation’s antiterrorism effort and responsible for coordinating the security of its critical ports and waterways. Our future success hinges upon our ability to continue building competencies to meet emerging demands and increasingly complicated, sometimes dangerous mission responsibilities. We are committed to ensuring that our workforce is prepared for such missions now and in the future. To accomplish these activities safely, our people need tailored effective training programs. Despite our best efforts and the professionalism, bravery and dedication of our workforce, casualties and mishaps have occurred, as in the case of Coast Guard Helicopter 6505 lead to serious injury or death in the line of duty. Such incidents are never acceptable and require us to implement better accident prevention programs.

CONCLUSION

I am very proud of the accomplishments of our service members. We succeed through the courage, sacrifice and devotion of its people. We ask much, and expect much from our people. By asking more of them, we are asking more from 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.

On behalf of the over 51,000 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*. With honor, respect and devotion to duty they are ALWAYS READY to answer the call.

We are Guardians. We are the United States Coast Guard.

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 answering any questions that you may have.