

REVIEW OF FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE COAST GUARD

(118-12)

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

APRIL 18, 2023

Printed for the use of the
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure



Available online at: [https://www.govinfo.gov/committee/house-transportation?path=/
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U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

58-897 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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[†] Master Chief Heath B. Jones did not submit a prepared statement for the record.



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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APRIL 14, 2023

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
RE: Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee Hearing on
“Review of Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request for the Coast Guard”

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will hold a hearing on Tuesday, April 18, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. ET in 2253 Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony on the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Budget Request for the Coast Guard in preparation for consideration of annual authorizing legislation for the Coast Guard. The Subcommittee will hear testimony from representatives of the United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard or Service).

II. BACKGROUND

The Coast Guard was established on January 28, 1915, through the consolidation of the Revenue Cutter Service (established in 1790) and the Lifesaving Service (established in 1848).¹ The Coast Guard later assumed the duties of three other agencies: the Lighthouse Service (established in 1789), the Steamboat Inspection Service (established in 1838), and the Bureau of Navigation (established in 1884).²

Under Section 102 of title 14, United States Code, the Coast Guard has primary responsibility to enforce or assist in the enforcement of all applicable Federal laws on, under, and over the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States; to ensure the safety of life and property at sea; to carry out domestic and international icebreaking activities; and, as one of the six armed forces of the United States, to maintain defense readiness to operate as a specialized service in the Navy upon the declaration of war or when the President directs.³

The Coast Guard is directed by a Commandant, appointed by the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, to a four-year term.⁴ Admiral Linda L. Fagan was sworn in as the 27th Commandant of the Coast Guard in June 2022.⁵

¹ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *History Timeline*, available at <https://www.history.uscg.mil/home/history-program/>

² *Id.*

³ 14 U.S.C. § 102.

⁴ 14 U.S.C. § 302.

⁵ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Biographies*, available at <https://www.uscg.mil/Biographies/Display/Article/3048180/admiral-linda-l-fagan/>.

III. BUDGET FOR THE COAST GUARD

The President's FY 2024 budget request for the Coast Guard and the FY 2023 enacted funding level are shown below.⁶ A comparison to the FY 2023 authorized levels is included in Appendix I.

Coast Guard FY 2023 Enacted to FY 2024 President's Budget Request Comparison

(Dollars in Thousands)

Program	FY 2023 Enacted	President's FY 2024 Budget Request	FY 2023 to FY 2024 Change (\$)	FY 2023 to FY 2024 Change (%)
Operations and Support (O&S)	\$ 9,700,478	\$ 10,223,488	\$ 523,010	5.4%
Medicare-Eligible Retiree Health Care Fund (MERHCF)	\$ 252,887	\$ 270,359	\$ 17,472	6.9%
Procurement, Construction and Improvements (PC&I) ...	\$ 1,669,650	\$ 1,550,000	\$ (119,650)	-7.2%
Research and Development (R&D)	\$ 7,476	\$ 7,476	\$ -	0%
Housing Fund †	\$ 4,000	\$ 4,000	\$ -	0%
Subtotal, Discretionary	\$ 11,634,491	\$ 12,055,323	\$ 420,832	3.6%
Retired Pay	\$ 2,044,414	\$ 1,147,244	\$ (897,170)	-43.9%
State Boating Safety Grants	\$ 132,442	\$ 144,340	\$ 11,898	9%
Maritime Oil Spill Program	\$ 101,000	\$ 101,000	\$ -	0%
General Gift Funds	\$ 2,864	\$ 2,864	\$ -	0%
Subtotal, Mandatory	\$ 2,280,720	\$ 1,395,448	\$ (885,272)	-38.8%

[†] Housing Funds appear as classified as a discretionary offsetting fees fee in the Coast Guard Congressional Justification. This figure reflects the spending of these collections. Housing Funds appear as Administrative Provisions in the Joint Explanatory Statement as multiple line items.

FY 2024 COAST GUARD BUDGET REQUEST:

The President requests \$13.5 billion for FY 2024 for the activities of the Coast Guard, including \$12.1 billion in total discretionary funding.⁷ The FY 2024 request for discretionary funding represents an increase of \$421 million (3.6 percent) from the FY 2023 enacted level.

OPERATIONS AND SUPPORT (O&S):

The President requests \$10.2 billion for the O&S account for FY 2024, a \$523 million (5.4 percent) increase from the FY 2023 enacted level.⁸ The O&S account supports the day-to-day activities of the Coast Guard including administrative expenses, support costs, travel, lease payments, and the operation and maintenance of infrastructure and assets. The O&S account also funds personnel compensation and benefits for approximately 44,000 military personnel and 9,000 civilian employees.⁹ Included in this request is \$5.4 billion for military pay and personnel support; \$433 million for mission support, including enterprise management and environmental compliance and restoration; and \$4.4 billion for field operations.¹⁰

The O&S budget request includes increases in funding to cover follow-on costs for the operation and maintenance of newly acquired assets and technology and increases in other administrative expenses such as an increase to cover the cost of the 2023 military pay raise (4.6 percent), 2023 civilian pay raise (4.6 percent), 2024 proposed military pay raise (5.2 percent), and 2024 proposed civilian pay raise (5.2 percent).¹¹ Like other military services, the Coast Guard has fallen short of its recruiting targets and is approximately 4,800 members short across its workforce.¹²

⁶ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, FY 2024 CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET JUSTIFICATION (2023), available at https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/documents/budget/2024/Coast_Guard_FY2024_Congressional_Justification.pdf [hereinafter BUDGET JUSTIFICATION]; Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-238 [hereinafter 2023 CAA].

⁷ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, 2024 BUDGET OVERVIEW: POSTURE STATEMENT, available at https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/documents/budget/2024/Coast_Guard_FY2024_Posture_Statement_FINAL.pdf [hereinafter 2024 BUDGET OVERVIEW: POSTURE STATEMENT].

¹¹ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

¹² *Id.*

To address these challenges, the Coast Guard requests \$12 million to fund additional personnel and offices to augment the Coast Guard's recruiting efforts.¹³

The President requests \$24.7 million within O&S for environmental compliance and restoration (EC&R) funding in FY 2024, a \$358,000 increase from the FY 2023 enacted level.¹⁴ The EC&R funding provides for the clean-up and restoration of contaminated Coast Guard facilities, and for the remediation of Coast Guard assets to ensure they are safe to operate or can be decommissioned in compliance with environmental laws. The requested funding for EC&R continues long-term monitoring at 29 sites and begins or continues investigation and remediation site work at 33 sites.¹⁵

The proposed O&S increases are offset in part by proposed cuts derived through decommissioning certain legacy assets that will result in a total cost savings of \$29.1 million and 167 full-time equivalent positions.¹⁶ Specifically, the FY 2024 budget request proposes the decommissioning of:

- Five HC-130H Long Range Surveillance Aircraft (\$9.8 million);
- One 210-foot Reliance Class Medium Endurance Cutter (\$4.2 million);
- Two 110-foot legacy Island Class Patrol Boats (\$1.7 million); and
- Six MH-65 helicopters (\$13.4 million).¹⁷

PROCUREMENT, CONSTRUCTION, AND IMPROVEMENTS (PC&I):

The President requests \$1.6 billion for the PC&I account, a \$120 million (7.2 percent) decrease over the FY 2023 enacted level.¹⁸ The PC&I account funds the acquisition, procurement, construction, rebuilding, and physical improvements of Coast Guard owned and operated vessels, aircraft, facilities, aids-to-navigation (AtoN), communications and information technology systems, and related equipment.¹⁹ Specifically, the budget request includes funding requests for sustainment and acquisition for several assets under PC&I which are broken down below.²⁰

In-Service Vessel Sustainment:

Major Maintenance Availabilities (MMA) ensure in-service vessels continue to meet their designed service life through the recapitalization of hull, mechanical, electrical and electronic systems that have been identified as the highest contributors to maintenance costs and operational availability degradation.²¹ Service Life Extension Programs (SLEPs) increase the service life of in-service vessels without significantly modifying capabilities. The budget requests: \$43 million for 47-ft Motor Life Boat SLEP; \$46.2 million for 270-ft Medium Endurance Cutter SLEP; \$17.8 million for 175-ft Coastal Buoy Tender MMA; and \$13 million for CGC Healy SLEP.²²

National Security Cutter (NSC):

The budget requests \$17.1 million for class wide activities, post-delivery of an 11th NSC and program close-out costs.²³ The Coast Guard's Program of Record (POR) originally called for eight NSCs to replace the Service's fleet of twelve high endurance cutters. The NSCs were originally intended to operate in excess of 185 days per year to maximize operational capability, but based on crewing and maintenance concerns, the Coast Guard now intends to operate the vessels for a maximum of 185 days per year.²⁴ Congress has funded eleven vessels. The tenth vessel is scheduled for delivery later this year.²⁵

¹³ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, 2024 BUDGET FACT SHEET, (Mar. 13, 2023), *available at* https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/documents/budget/2024/FY2024_Budget_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

¹⁴ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ 2024 BUDGET OVERVIEW: POSTURE STATEMENT, *supra* note 10.

¹⁷ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, REPORT TO CONGRESS: ANALYZING COST AND PERFORMANCE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY CUTTER OPERATIONAL EMPLOYMENT (on file with Comm.).

²⁵ CONG. RESEARCH SERV., R42567, COAST GUARD CUTTER PROCUREMENT: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES FOR CONGRESS (2023), *available at* <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42567>.

Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC):

The budget requests \$579 million for the construction of OPC #6, and Long Lead Time Materials (LLTMs) for OPC #7.²⁶ The Coast Guard's POR calls for 25 OPCs to replace the Service's aging fleet of 29 Medium Endurance Cutters (WMECs).²⁷ The delivery of OPC #1 is anticipated to occur in FY 2023.

Fast Response Cutter (FRC):

The budget requests \$20 million for production management costs and post-delivery activities. The Coast Guard's POR calls for a total of 65 FRCs to replace the Service's fleet of 110-ft Island Class Patrol Boats (WPBs). To date, 50 vessels have been commissioned into service.²⁸ Delivery of hulls 51 through 54 is anticipated to occur in FY 2023.²⁹ Funding for an additional four FRCs is included in the Coast Guard's Unfunded Priority List (UPL), which would be hulls 66 through 69.³⁰

Boats:

The budget requests \$6.5 million to support the acquisition, development and management of production, delivery, and warranty support for multi-mission cutter and shore-based boats.³¹

Polar Security Cutter (PSC):

The budget requests \$170 million to advance procurement of the PSC.³² The service's POR calls for three PSC to replace the service's two heavy icebreakers—only one of which is still operational. The first PSC is expected to be delivered between 2026 and 2027. The program has been subject to significant delays. At the end of last year, V.T. Halter Marine, the yard that was awarded the contract, was purchased by Bollinger Shipyards.³³

Commercially Available Polar Icebreaker:

The budget requests \$125 million for the purchase of a commercially available Polar Icebreaker.³⁴

Waterways Commerce Cutter Program:

The budget requests \$98 million to support project management and production activities associated with the current recapitalization of the Coast Guard's fleet of inland tenders and barges.³⁵

Great Lakes Icebreaker:

The budget requests \$55 million to support the acquisition program of a heavy icebreaker that would operate on the Great Lakes during the winter months.³⁶

Aircraft:

The budget requests \$114.8 million for aircraft, which includes funding for missionization of 14 HC-27Js received from the United States Air Force, program administration activities for the HC-130J aircraft, sustainment of MH-65 and MH-60 helicopters, and installation of small unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) capability on the NSC fleet.³⁷ In its UPL, the Coast Guard included \$138.5 million for the purchase of one missionized HC-130J.³⁸ The Coast Guard currently has three unfunded aircraft of the 22 HC-130Js called for in its program of record. The Service also requests \$113 million in its UPL for 4 MH-60T helicopters.³⁹

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

³⁰ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, FY 2024 UNFUNDED PRIORITIES LIST (2023), *available at* https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/documents/budget/2024/Unfunded_Priorities_List_FY2024.pdf [hereinafter 2024 UPL].

³¹ *Id.*

³² BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

³³ CONG. RESEARCH SERV., RL34391, COAST GUARD CUTTER PROCUREMENT: POLAR SECURITY CUTTER: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES FOR CONGRESS (2023), *available at* <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/RL3439>.

³⁴ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ 2024 UPL, *supra* note 30.

³⁹ *Id.*

Other Acquisition Programs:

The budget requests \$100.6 million for other acquisition programs, including \$25.3 million to update the service's antiquated IT technology.⁴⁰ The Service's UPL includes \$11 million for a new mariner credentialing system. The current system was established in the early 1990s.⁴¹ It is a limiting factor as our Nation seeks to increase the pool of licensed mariners.

Construction and Facilities Maintenance:

The budget request also includes \$144 million for shore facilities and AtoN.⁴² This request is a decrease of approximately \$271 million from the FY 2023 enacted level.⁴³ The Coast Guard estimates that there is a \$1 billion deferred shore facility maintenance backlog, while the Government Accountability Office (GAO) approximated that number at \$2.6 billion in February 2019 (likely higher today), according to Coast Guard information.⁴⁴ As of 2018, the deferred maintenance backlog included more than 5,600 projects, while the recapitalization and new construction backlog included 125 projects.⁴⁵ GAO's analysis of Coast Guard data found that as of November 2018, there were hundreds of recapitalization projects without cost estimates—representing a majority of recapitalization projects.⁴⁶ Coast Guard officials told GAO that these projects were in the preliminary stages of development.⁴⁷ From that report, the GAO recommended that the Commandant of the Coast Guard employ models for its asset lines to predict the outcome of investments, analyze trade-offs, and optimize decisions among competing investments.⁴⁸ In addition to the amount included in their budget request, the Coast Guard included \$694.3 million in their FY 2024 UPL for shore facility maintenance.⁴⁹

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT:

The President requests \$7.5 million in FY 2024 for the Coast Guard's Research and Development (R&D) account, an amount equal to the FY 2023 enacted level.⁵⁰ The R&D account supports improved mission performance for the Service's 11 statutory missions through applied research and development of new technology and methods.

The Coast Guard intends to use the requested \$7.5 million in FY 2024 to develop technologies and systems that improve operational presence and response, as well as perform technology assessments to inform the early stages of the acquisition process. Of the funding, \$500,000 is derived from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund as authorized by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (33 U.S.C. § 2701–2761).⁵¹

IV. WITNESSES

- Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant, United States Coast Guard
- Master Chief Heath B. Jones, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, United States Coast Guard

⁴⁰ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

⁴¹ 2024 UPL, *supra* note 30.

⁴² BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

⁴³ 2023 CAA, *supra* note 6.

⁴⁴ GAO, GAO-19-711T, COAST GUARD SHORE INFRASTRUCTURE: ACTIONS NEEDED TO BETTER MANAGE ASSETS AND REDUCE RISKS AND COSTS (2019), *available at* <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-711t.pdf>.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ 2024 UPL, *supra* note 30.

⁵⁰ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

⁵¹ *Id.*

**APPENDIX I: COAST GUARD FY 2023 ENACTED TO FY 2024 PRESIDENT'S BUDGET
REQUEST COMPARISON**

Coast Guard FY 2023 Enacted to FY 2024 President's Budget Request Comparison

(Dollars in Thousands)

Program	FY 2023 Authorized ⁵²	FY 2023 Enacted ⁵³	President's FY 2024 Budget Request ⁵⁴	FY 2023 to FY 2024 Change (\$)	FY 2023 to FY 2024 Change (%)
Operations and Support (O&S)	\$ 10,750,000	\$ 9,700,478	\$ 10,223,488	\$ 523,010	5.4%
Environmental Compliance and Restoration (EC&R)**	\$ 24,353	\$ 24,359	\$ 24,717	\$ 358	1.5%
Medicare-Eligible Retiree Health Care Fund (MERHCF)	\$	\$ 252,887	\$ 270,359	\$ 17,472	6.9%
Procurement, Construction, and Improvements (PC&I)	\$ 3,477,600	\$ 1,669,650	\$ 1,550,000	\$ (119,650)	-7.2%
Research and Development (R&D)	\$ 14,681	\$ 7,476	\$ 7,476	\$ -	0%
Housing Fund †	\$	\$ 4,000	\$ 4,000	\$ -	0%
Subtotal, Discretionary	\$	\$ 11,634,491	\$ 12,055,323	\$ 420,832	3.6%
Retired Pay	\$ 2,044,414	\$ 2,044,414	\$ 1,147,244	\$ (897,170)	-43.9%
State Boating Safety Grants	\$	\$ 132,442	\$ 144,340	\$ 11,898	9%
Maritime Oil Spill Program	\$	\$ 101,000	\$ 101,000	\$ -	0%
General Gift Funds	\$	\$ 2,864	\$ 2,864	\$ -	0%
Subtotal, Mandatory	\$	\$ 2,280,720	\$ 1,395,448	\$ (885,272)	-38.8%
Total	\$	\$ 13,915,211	\$ 13,450,771	\$ (464,440)	-3.3%

† Housing Funds are classified as discretionary offsetting fees. This figure reflects the spending of these collections. Housing funds appear as Administrative Provisions in the Joint Explanatory Statement as multiple line items.

⁵² James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263.

⁵³ 2023 CAA, *supra* note 6.

⁵⁴ BUDGET JUSTIFICATION, *supra* note 6.

REVIEW OF FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE COAST GUARD

TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND
MARITIME TRANSPORTATION,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:16 p.m. in room 2253 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Daniel Webster (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chairman be able to declare a recess at any time during this subcommittee hearing.

So ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit and to ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

Remember, if you have a document to insert in the record, be sure to email it to the T&I Committee.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement of 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL WEBSTER OF FLORIDA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Today, we are convened to receive testimony from the Coast Guard on the fiscal year 2024 budget request. I would like to welcome our witnesses, Admiral Linda Fagan, the Commandant of the Coast Guard; and Master Chief Heath B. Jones, the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard.

Commandant, I certainly appreciated the trip through Florida and points south. I really had a great time, it was good, along with those that came with us during the district work week.

Both of our witnesses actually started their tenure here just this last year. So, we welcome you both.

As we examine the Coast Guard's fiscal year 2024 budget request, the Coast Guard continues to be spread thin. At a time when the Coast Guard has seen an ever-increasing demand for its services, I fear the headwinds of recruiting challenges and insufficient budget requests jeopardize the Service's ability to meet their mission's needs.

While the President's budget includes an increase in operations and support, the procurement, construction, and improvements ac-

count—which pays for the new vessels, IT, and shoreside infrastructure investments you need to meet future missions—would be funded at less than half the level that Congress authorized last year if we were to enact the administration’s request. The committee is deeply concerned about what it would mean to the future of mission capabilities.

At the same time, like other Armed Forces, the Coast Guard is facing recruitment challenges. Those challenges are only expected to get worse in the coming years. This year, the expected shortfall is about 4,800 members. I look forward to hearing from you on what you are doing to address those challenges.

As the Biden administration continues to pursue expansion of offshore wind energy production off our coast, I want to ensure the Coast Guard is taking its role as the primary Federal agency responsible for maritime navigation safety seriously, and that it is not merely being a rubber stamp for the Department of the Interior. Regrettably, it appears that the Coast Guard continues to implement the recommendation of the Atlantic Coast Port Route Study at a glacial pace, even after being directed by Congress to implement those recommendations.

I am sure some of my colleagues will have questions about these efforts and whether we can expect any resolution in the near term.

I also remain concerned about the security of our ports’ infrastructure, especially as it relates to the Chinese cranes at our marine terminals and continued cyber intrusions that threaten our port operations. I look forward to hearing what the Coast Guard is doing to counter those threats from cyberattacks, transnational crime organizations, and bad state actors.

Commandant Fagan, I understand that, per the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022, the Department of Transportation has been given 90 days to request a transfer of LORAN towers from the Coast Guard. If no request is received, then the Coast Guard can proceed with disposition of the towers. I urge you not to provide DOT with any extension of this 90-day period. LORAN ceased operation in 2008. In fact, DOT has had not 90 days to make this decision, but they have had 15 years and 90 days, a long time. Time is not what is lacking, the ability to make a decision by DOT is what is lacking.

On the final note, in 2016, Congress directed the Coast Guard to determine the portion of track 43 on St. Paul Island, Alaska, that the Service needed to be retained in order to carry out its reduced operational role on the island after the 2008 closure of the LORAN facility on the island. The legislation further directed the Service to transfer the remainder of track 43 to the local Alaska Native Village Corporation.

On June 13, 2017, within the statutory timeframe, the Coast Guard submitted to Congress a map of the portion of track 43 to be retained, and the portion which would be transferred. The statutory deadline for the transfer was August 13, 2017, roughly—a lot of days ago. The committee was surprised to learn recently that, only after asking the Service for a status of the transfer, that the transfer had never occurred, and the Coast Guard now intends to amend the boundary of the portion of track 43 to be transferred.

The committee has no objection to amending the boundaries, assuming the amendment meets an operational Coast Guard need. However, by the close of business day, Friday, April 28th, I ask the Coast Guard to please provide committee staff with a briefing on the transfer, including a map showing the amended boundaries of the parcel proposed to be transferred. Do you think that could be accommodated?

Admiral FAGAN. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. We look forward to accommodating that request.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you. Thank you for your participation today. I look forward to your testimony.

[Mr. Webster of Florida's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Daniel Webster of Florida, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation**

Today we convene to receive testimony from the Coast Guard on its Fiscal Year 2024 budget request.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses—Admiral Linda L. Fagan, the Commandant of the Coast Guard, and Master Chief Heath B. Jones, the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard. Commandant, I certainly appreciated the opportunity to travel to Key West with you over the recent District Work Period. Both of our witnesses assumed their roles last year, and we welcome them both.

As we examine the Coast Guard's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request, the Coast Guard continues to be spread thin. At a time when the Coast Guard is seeing an ever-increasing demand for its services, I fear the headwinds of recruiting challenges and insufficient budget requests jeopardize the Service's ability to meet its mission requirements.

While the President's budget includes an increase for the Operations and Support program, the Procurement, Construction and Improvements Account—which pays for the new vessels, aircraft, IT, and shoreside infrastructure investments the Coast Guard needs to meet its future missions—would be funded at less than half the level Congress authorized last year. The Committee is deeply concerned about what that would mean for future mission capability.

At the same time, like other armed services, the Coast Guard is facing recruiting challenges. Those challenges are only expected to worsen in coming years. This year, the Service workforce is expected to fall 4,800 members short. I look forward to hearing from you on what you are doing to address those challenges.

As the Biden Administration continues to pursue its expansion of offshore wind energy production, I want to ensure that the Coast Guard is taking its role as the primary Federal agency responsible for maritime navigation safety seriously, and not merely acting as a rubber stamp for the Department of the Interior. Regrettably, it appears that the Coast Guard continues to implement the recommendations of the Atlantic Coast Port Route Study at a glacial pace—even after being directed by Congress to implement those recommendations.

I'm sure some of my colleagues will have questions about these efforts, and whether we can expect any resolution in the near term. I also remain concerned about the security of our port infrastructure, especially as it relates to the use of Chinese cranes at our marine terminals, and continuous cyber intrusions that threaten port operations.

I look forward to hearing what the Coast Guard is doing to counter threats from cyberattacks, transnational crime organizations, and bad state actors.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. I now recognize Ranking Member Carbajal for an opening statement.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Chair Webster, for calling today's hearing on the fiscal year 2024 budget request for the U.S. Coast Guard.

Before I provide my remarks, I want to ask for unanimous consent that Ranking Member Larsen's written statement be included in the record.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. So ordered.
 [Mr. Larsen of Washington's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen of Washington, Ranking Member,
 Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you, Chair Webster. The U.S. Coast Guard plays a vital role in safeguarding the efficient movement of goods in our marine transportation system and so much more. The women and men of the Coast Guard conduct search and rescue operations at sea, prevent the shipment of drugs across our maritime borders, and protect sovereignty in the Arctic and across the world.

The Coast Guard is a lifesaving agency, a regulatory agency, a law enforcement agency, and a military agency. Each aspect is critical to our national and economic security.

I would like to welcome Admiral Fagan and Master Chief Jones and commend you both for your leadership at the Coast Guard. I know Coasties pride themselves for doing a lot with a little but that needs to change.

For fiscal year 2024 the Coast Guard has requested \$13.5 billion, which represents a 3.6 percent increase over the 2023 enacted budget. While this may put the Coast Guard on a better path, we must do better. We cannot expect to have a big-league Coast Guard with little league funding.

Some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have suggested reverting back to FY22 funding levels. Doing so would severely impact the Coast Guard causing them to halt their two highest priority acquisitions—the Offshore Patrol Cutter and Polar Security Cutter—putting them further behind. Cutting Coast Guard funding would reduce operational readiness along our maritime borders and impact national security. We cannot allow this to happen.

Fortunately, I believe that my Committee colleagues understand the importance of robust Coast Guard funding and I look forward to marking up a strong Coast Guard Authorization Act next week.

Coast Guard members and their families are too often forced to live and work in dilapidated buildings and Coasties often work on cutters with out-of-date technology.

Coasties stationed on cutters at sea should be able to call their families, Coast Guard cadets at the Coast Guard Academy should be able to sleep in rooms that are free of asbestos, and Coasties across the Service should have access to gender appropriate bathrooms.

While I applaud the Coast Guard's efforts to modernize its recruitment plan, the best way to recruit and retain more service members is to support our Coasties.

My primary concern is the deplorable, dilapidated buildings servicemembers must work and live in on a daily basis. Inadequate housing and childcare are a persistent complaint amongst servicemembers. If we want to increase retention and diversity, we must do more to support our Coast Guard members.

I am concerned about the downward trend in recruiting. The Coast Guard needs to recruit over 4,000 service members in order to reach its recruiting goal. I look forward to an update on progress made to meet the 2023 recruitment goal.

I am also concerned about the 35.6 percent decrease in funding requested for shore facilities and aids to navigation. This is particularly alarming considering the Coast Guard's estimated \$3 billion shoreside infrastructure maintenance backlog.

This deficit has grown after many years of underfunding, and I want to know how the Coast Guard arrived at just \$180 million needed to address the backlog.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how the President's budget will ensure adequate resources for the Coast Guard, MARAD, the FMC, and all the programs that support and regulate the U.S. maritime industry.

Finally, I'd like to take a minute to recognize the work the Coast Guard has done to help address sexual assault and sexual harassment in the commercial maritime industry. Since Congress enacted the Safer Seas Act in December, the Coast Guard has taken immediate action to ensure prompt implementation.

The Service has created a centralized location for reporting of incidents, distributed information to industry on reporting requirements and associated penalties, and opened new investigations and prosecutions under the new authority. The Coast Guard has to be candid with its needs and Congress must provide the necessary resources.

I will be watching closely as the Coast Guard completes implementation of the Safer Seas Act.

Thank you and I yield back.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SALUD O. CARBAJAL OF CALIFORNIA, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Admiral Fagan and Master Chief Jones, thank you for being here today, and thank you for your service. Your leadership is instrumental in supporting Coasties, and you have done an outstanding job leading the Service. I am confident that the Coast Guard has a bright future ahead under your experienced guidance.

As has been mentioned, the Coast Guard performs many important roles that are critical for maintaining our national and economic security. From ensuring navigable waterways to securing our borders and the safety of life at sea, the Coast Guard's mission set is very diverse. We expect a lot from our Coasties, and this oftentimes requires them to wear multiple hats. For instance, a drug interdiction can quickly turn into a search and rescue mission. While the Coast Guard's responsibilities have expanded, its budget has not.

I was pleased that the fiscal year 2024 budget request included a slight increase in the discretionary funding, but more resources are still needed to support the Service.

I am pleased that the Coast Guard has been able to replace much of its 40-year-old surface fleet and aircraft. Last Congress, I was proud to support the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022, which authorized substantial funding to address long-overdue vessel and equipment replacement, as well as shoreline infrastructure repair. Unfortunately, these levels were not matched in the fiscal year 2022 budget.

Aside from the new assets and upgraded facilities, there are other ways to improve the lives of servicemembers, both on land and at sea. I have heard from servicemembers across the country about mental health concerns. Their job can take a physical and mental toll, which is only exacerbated by a 4,000 servicemember deficit. We must do more not only to expand mental health services, but also to improve the quality of life for servicemembers, especially those in isolated locations, some of which I have visited.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Coast Guard's efforts to address sexual assault and harassment in the commercial maritime industry. I was an original cosponsor of the Safer Seas Act, and I am glad to see that the Coast Guard has acted swiftly to implement the important reforms passed last Congress. We have a long way to go, but I believe under Admiral Fagan's leadership, we will bring justice to victims and help protect future mariners from harm.

I look forward to today's testimonies and discussions about how Congress can support a robust Coast Guard.

[Mr. Carbajal's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Salud O. Carbajal of California, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation

Thank you, Chair Webster, for calling today's hearing on the fiscal year 2024 budget request for the U.S. Coast Guard.

Admiral Fagan and Master Chief Jones, thank you for being here today and thank you for your service. Your leadership is instrumental in supporting Coasties and you've done an outstanding job leading the Service. I'm confident that the Coast Guard has a bright future ahead under your experienced guidance.

As has been mentioned, the Coast Guard performs many important roles that are critical for maintaining our national and economic security. From ensuring navigable waterways to securing our borders and the safety of life at sea, the Coast Guard's mission set is diverse.

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I look forward to today's testimonies and discussions about how Congress can support a robust Coast Guard.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. I would now like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for being here today.

I ask unanimous consent that the witnesses' full statements be included in the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

As your written testimony has been made part of the record, the committee asks that you limit your oral remarks to 5 minutes.

With that, Admiral Fagan, you are recognized for 5 minutes of testimony.

TESTIMONY OF ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN, COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD; AND MASTER CHIEF HEATH B. JONES, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD, U.S. COAST GUARD

TESTIMONY OF ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN, COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Admiral FAGAN. Good afternoon, Chairman Webster. Thank you, Ranking Member Carbajal, distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and thank you for entering my written testimony into the record.

On behalf of the entire Service, thank you for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard. With the funding provided in 2023 appropriation, we are continuing our largest fleet re-

capitalization in decades, building vital shore infrastructure and supporting our workforce and their families.

The world is changing, and the pace of that change is accelerating. Our commitments to defend, protect, and save grow every day, and demand for the Service around the globe has never been higher. In these challenges, there is an opportunity, and we must invest in 2024 and beyond to generate sustained readiness, resilience, and capability to build the Coast Guard of the future.

The Coast Guard workforce is my highest priority. But like other branches of the Armed Forces, the Coast Guard is experiencing a workforce shortage. We are struggling to recruit the people we need to hire into our ranks every year. Our recruiting shortfall threatens our readiness, threatens our ability to serve the American people. We must invest not just in workforce recruiting capacity, but in support initiatives to meet mission: healthcare, childcare, and housing.

We are a global Coast Guard. And as we continue to invest in the homeland, we also serve to counter strategic competition around the world. The Coast Guard serves as the Nation's surface presence in the Arctic and Antarctica, and our fleet of only two polar icebreakers does not deliver the high-latitude presence we require as an Arctic nation. The fiscal year 2024 budget requests funding to grow the Coast Guard's icebreaking capacity to enable a shift from episodic presence to year-round presence in the high latitudes.

Every Coast Guard mission begins and ends at a shore facility. To generate readiness, retain our workforce, and support our families, we must maintain and modernize our buildings, piers, housing, and other infrastructure. The Coast Guard requires stable, predictable shore infrastructure funding to ensure facilities are ready when new assets arrive, and personnel have the space they need to support the recapitalized fleet.

Consistent funding is vital for us to recapitalize our many antiquated stations, sectors, training centers, air stations, and housing, some of which were built in the late 1800s. The fiscal year 2024 budget includes funding to build out Base Charleston and to complete construction of future cutter home ports in Washington and Alaska.

My vision of a \$20 billion Coast Guard in 2033 includes \$400 to \$500 million a year to accomplish this infrastructure work. And I am certain you will not find a better return on investment for the American people than the United States Coast Guard. I ask for your continued support to ensure that the Nation's Coast Guard, like every U.S. Armed Force, has the resources necessary to safeguard the Nation.

I appreciate the committee's enduring support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[Admiral Fagan's prepared statement follows:]



**Prepared Statement of Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant,
U.S. Coast Guard**

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify and I am grateful for your continuing support of the United States Coast Guard. Today, I look forward to discussing how the Administration's FY 2024 Budget request positions the Service to generate sustained readiness, resilience, and capability while building the Coast Guard of the future.

As the world's premier, multi-mission, maritime service responsible for the safety, security and stewardship of the Nation's waters, the Coast Guard offers a unique and enduring value to the American public. At all times a military service and branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, a federal law enforcement agency, a first responder, a regulatory body, and a member of the U.S. Intelligence Community, the Coast Guard serves on the front lines for a Nation whose economic prosperity and national security are inextricably linked to the sea.

Last year, your Coast Guard navigated unique challenges presented by our increasingly connected and rapidly changing world. Throughout the course of FY 2022, the Service saved or assisted over 24,000 people, removed over 335,000 pounds of cocaine and 60,000 pounds of marijuana with an approximate wholesale value of \$4.2 billion, provided humanitarian assistance to over 12,500 non-citizens intercepted at sea, inspected over 15,000 shipping containers for structural and hazardous material compliance, maintained nearly 45,000 buoys and beacons across the Marine Transportation System, conducted over 10,000 waterborne patrols to protect critical infrastructure and key resources, and provided nearly 21,000 hours of support to U.S. Central Command to advance security cooperation, maritime security, and counter-piracy objectives in the Arabian Gulf.

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Ian, Fiona, and Nicole, Coast Guard personnel from across the country surged to Puerto Rico, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia where we saved or assisted nearly 1,000 persons in distress, responded to pollution incidents, and reopened vital ports and waterways to help communities recover.

In the Antarctic, Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) *Polar Star*, the Nation's only heavy polar icebreaker, created a navigable path through thick ice to enable the annual replenishment of America's McMurdo Station. In the Great Lakes, CGC *Mackinaw*—the Coast Guard's only heavy domestic icebreaker—opened passages to facilitate commercial shipping across the region.

In the Indo-Pacific, 418-foot National Security Cutters and 154-foot Fast Response Cutters conducted combined operations and exercises with allied and partner nations to counter Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing and facilitate interoperability with like-minded nations throughout the region. In the Caribbean, the Coast Guard surged assets from across the Atlantic seaboard to respond, in coordination with other federal agencies, to historic irregular maritime migration on our southern maritime border.

While I remain incredibly proud of our Coast Guard Active Duty, Reserve, Civilian, and Auxiliary workforce, we must adapt to ensure the accelerating pace of change does not overtake our ability to protect, defend, and save the American public we serve. Geopolitical competition, economic volatility, climate change impacts, shifting workforce expectations, evolving technologies, and new enterprises at sea are converging and driving changes we must make for our Service.

The FY 2024 President's Budget is the first step in advancing our efforts to transform our total workforce, sharpen our competitive edge, and advance our mission excellence as we build the Coast Guard of the future. These investments are vital to ensuring the Service has the assets, systems, infrastructure, and support needed to further the Nation's maritime safety, security, and prosperity.

GENERATE SUSTAINED READINESS, RESILIENCE, AND CAPABILITY

Transform our Total Workforce

A shrinking American workforce combined with changing expectations by both employees and employers is driving significant challenges in recruiting and hiring. American workers seek flexibility, innovation, purpose, and desire employers who foster a workplace where all people are respected and empowered.

My highest priority is to modernize our talent management system, which has not significantly changed in 75 years, to best recruit and retain our workforce in the 21st century. I am committed to deploying innovative recruiting practices; revolu-

tionizing talent management policies; developing individually tailored, on-demand, and modernized learning; and delivering point of need healthcare and family services.

The FY 2024 budget requests \$273 million in military and civilian pay and benefits; \$21 million to increase retention, bolster medical services, improve the Service's training systems, and better support the workforce; as well as \$12 million to enhance the Coast Guard's recruiting capability by funding additional recruiting personnel and nine new recruiting offices.

Sharpen our Competitive Edge

New and rapid advancements are making access to technology ubiquitous. These technological advancements expose global systems and people to modern threats, including growing cybersecurity concerns, supply chain disruptions, and navigation vulnerabilities. However, emerging technologies also present novel opportunities to maintain a competitive edge over malign actors.

To accomplish the broad spectrum of Coast Guard missions, we will leverage new technology to enable rapid information sharing and provide decision advantage to our operational commanders. Smart application of advanced data analysis capabilities will enable us to make the best decisions as we inspect new commercial vessels, search for overdue recreational boaters, bolster our talent management system, and seek to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs across our maritime border.

The FY 2024 budget requests \$49 million to sustain enterprise collaboration tools, search and rescue IT systems, and C5I capabilities on board operational assets. Additionally, the budget includes \$15 million for data analytic technology development, improving how data is collected, analyzed, and leveraged to empower operations and support the workforce. Requested funding also supports the rapid development of mobile applications and bolsters telework capabilities.

Advance our Mission Excellence

The Coast Guard operates in dynamic conditions, and changes in the strategic environment impact our missions every day. Given evolving national security threats, we must prepare now for the challenges of tomorrow.

We will employ our assets and resources to the highest priority missions that we are uniquely capable to perform, build on our ability to lead in crisis, strengthen existing and forge new partnerships to improve global maritime governance, and safeguard a rapidly changing Marine Transportation System.

The FY 2024 budget requests \$77 million for the operations, maintenance, crew, and mission support elements for four Fast Response Cutters; operations and maintenance for the second Offshore Patrol Cutter; crew, operations, and maintenance for a commercially available polar icebreaker; crew for the first Waterways Commerce Cutter; and crew, operations, and maintenance for four MH-60T helicopters, one HC-130J aircraft, and one HC-27J aircraft. Additionally, the budget includes \$18 million for the operations and maintenance of newly acquired or recapitalized shore facilities.

BUILD THE COAST GUARD OF THE FUTURE

The Service continues our largest recapitalization effort since World War II—vital to providing the capable, modern assets necessary to meet the unprecedented demand for Coast Guard services. Additionally, the Coast Guard continues to prioritize investments in our shore infrastructure because our facilities, piers, runways, and the buildings where our people eat and sleep while standing duty are as critical for operations as our ships and aircraft.

Surface

With the continued strong support of both the Administration and Congress, we are acquiring the Nation's first new heavy polar icebreakers in almost half a century. The FY 2024 request of \$170 million sustains the program and procures an additional portion of long-lead time materials for the third Polar Security Cutter (PSC). When fully operational, PSCs will provide the global reach and icebreaking capability necessary to advance our national interests in the Arctic and Antarctic regions, projecting U.S. sovereignty and influence while conducting Coast Guard statutory missions in the high latitudes.

The FY 2024 request also funds the acquisition of a commercially available polar icebreaker, including the modifications and integrated logistics support required to reach initial operating capability for Coast Guard missions. The purchase and modification of a commercially available polar icebreaker represents an effective strategy to increase near-term presence in the Arctic until the PSC fleet is operational and to add regional capacity in the long-term.

The Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC) is one of the Service's highest acquisition priorities and is absolutely vital to recapitalizing the capability provided by our legacy fleet of 210-foot and 270-foot Medium Endurance Cutters (MEC). The FY 2024 request provides \$579 million for construction of the sixth OPC and long lead time materials for the seventh of a program of record for 25 hulls. The legacy assets the OPC's will replace have been workhorses for decades and continue to serve the Nation with distinction. With 13 of these cutters exceeding 50 years of Service, the MEC fleet is becoming more difficult and expensive to maintain, and we continue to see degradation in its operational availability.

Some of our inland tenders have been in service since the 1940s, maintaining both fixed and floating aids to navigation for the U.S. Marine Transportation System—the 25,000 miles of rivers and navigable channels that support \$5.4 trillion in annual commerce and 31 million jobs. The FY 2024 request for \$98 million supports program management, long lead time material for future hulls, and construction of the first article of the Waterways Commerce Cutter fleet. These cutters—which will replace our legacy inland tender fleet—will feature modern designs for propulsion and crew habitability to enable men and women to serve in the heartland.

Aviation Assets

The FY 2024 request includes \$115M to recapitalize and sustain fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, including: sustainment of the current MH-60T helicopter fleet; modernization and sustainment of the Coast Guard's MH-65 helicopter fleet to improve reliability into the 2030s, align recapitalization efforts with DoD's Future Vertical Lift program and transition to an all MH-60 fleet; and continued missionization of HC-27J medium-range surveillance aircraft.

Shore Infrastructure

Shore facility maintenance and recapitalization is critical to mission success. As the Service deploys new, more capable assets, infrastructure projects like pier construction and workforce facilities are equally vital. The FY 2024 request includes targeted investments to continue the buildout of Base Charleston, South Carolina, funds the construction of a Fast Response Cutter homeport in Seward, Alaska, and funds construction of a Waterways Commerce Cutter homeport.

Given the Coast Guard's broad infrastructure needs, these investments and a modern approach to project planning, prioritizing, and execution are necessary to ensure the Service has the adequately maintained and resilient infrastructure required to meet the operational demands of today and tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

The Coast Guard is the only military Service outside the Department of Defense and the only Armed Force that is primarily funded via non-defense appropriations. Not funding the Coast Guard at the levels requested in this budget could jeopardize the long-term readiness of the Service, putting American lives, national security, and the U.S. Marine Transportation System at risk. I ask for your support to ensure the Coast Guard—like every U.S. Armed Force—has the resources necessary to safeguard the Nation.

Now is the time to move the U.S. Coast Guard forward. Our commitments at home to protect, defend, and save—grow every day, while demand for the Service around the globe has never been higher. To meet the rising challenges, we must invest to secure the homeland and counter strategic competitors.

With the support of the Administration and Congress, your Coast Guard will continue to live up to our motto—Semper Paratus—Always Ready. Thank you for your enduring support.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you. Next we have Master Chief Jones.

You are recognized.

TESTIMONY OF MASTER CHIEF HEATH B. JONES, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD, U.S. COAST GUARD

Master Chief JONES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished subcommittee members. It is an honor to appear before you as a Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard.

As I begin, I would like to express my sincere appreciation alongside Admiral Fagan and on behalf of our dedicated Coast Guard personnel for your unwavering support.

The Coast Guard workforce is the heart and soul of our organization, and their dedication and sacrifice keep our Nation safe and secure. Every day, Coast Guard sentinels put their lives on the line to protect our Nation's maritime borders, respond to emergencies, and ensure the safety of all Marine Transportation System users. These highly skilled members execute a broad array of missions which require modern resources to recruit, train, and to retain them.

As we discuss the future of the Coast Guard, my primary focus is on our sentinels, specifically the Service's ability to attract and retain the talented individuals necessary to effectively carry out the critical missions our Nation demands and our Nation deserves. The Coast Guard is a relatively small force, and we compete with other branches of the military and Federal agencies to attract and retain talented individuals.

The Coast Guard's recent recruiting initiatives include opening 10 new recruiting offices, leveraging innovative technology to reach potential recruits, initiating 4 new JROTC programs, and developing the Scout Talent and Refer program to incentivize servicemembers to tell the Coast Guard story. We are applying a comprehensive workforce approach to this effort.

The fiscal year 2024 recruiting request will enhance the Coast Guard's recruiting ability, while ensuring our members continue to excel at their demanding missions.

The Coast Guard is more than a military service. We are a closely bonded community. Our Coast Guard families are paramount. Their altruistic sacrifices and constant support are imperative to achieving our missions. The Coast Guard can continue to retain our members and their families by providing affordable housing, access to quality mental and physical healthcare, competitive compensation, and modernized infrastructure. These issues are vital to our workforce and vital to their families.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Congress for enacting the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act, mandating that States recognize the professional licenses of military members and their spouses from other States, alleviating the burden of relocating every 3 to 4 years. This initiative is a key example of Congress' support of our military and of their families.

While I acknowledge that those that join the Service are not primarily motivated by financial gain, it is essential to recognize that they may be more likely to leave for a better compensation elsewhere. The fiscal year 2024 pay raise is a good step in the right direction and is the largest increase since 2002. To ensure that we continue to be an employer of choice, we must continue to invest in the basic pay scale.

The birthplace of our enlisted workforce is Training Center Cape May. While we are thankful for the recent support of Congress to recapitalize the first barracks, the current facilities inhibit the ability to continuously train recruits to a significant service standard throughout the year. Therefore, the Service needs a modernized training facility to develop the most resilient and fleet-ready senti-

nels. To this end, the Coast Guard has included a multipurpose training facility at Cape May as part of our unfunded priorities list in fiscal year 2024.

Rest assured that your Coast Guard remains steadfast in its dedication to attracting and retaining skilled sentinels that are empowered to protect, to defend, and to save.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[Master Chief Jones did not submit a prepared statement.]

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you so much. And we now turn to questions from the panel. I get to be first, so, I will ask my first question to the Commandant.

What are the capability or resource gaps that exist? Which ones, or which one, even, is the most important to you? And how are you working with DHS to address those?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I remain committed to increasing the capacity and capabilities of the Coast Guard, and remain focused around workforce and, again, acknowledge and appreciate the enduring support of the committee.

When you look at the fiscal year 2024 budget, President's budget, there is great support for frontline operating capacity in the budget and investment in infrastructure, piers, buildings, IT. The President's budget, 2024 budget, in conjunction with our unfunded priority list request, does a good job capturing the infrastructure and investments needed across the organization.

Ensuring that Coast Guard members, as we field these state-of-the-art new cutters and aircraft, that Coast Guard members have adequate facilities to return to. Every Coast Guard operation starts and stops at a piece of shore infrastructure. So, ensuring that not only are we building the new capacity docks to field those cutters, that we are updating the aging capacity at stations and otherwise, so that our Coast Guard men and women can operate from state-of-the-art facilities. Thank you.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Until this past time we were down there in Key West, I didn't realize they also were passenger ships, the cutters. They were saying hauled over 125, 115—something like that—people. So, maybe there needs to be some slight modification for that. I don't know.

But anyway, the budget request includes \$98 million in procurement funding for the Waterways Commerce Cutter program to replace the Coast Guard's aging inland tender fleet, some of which are approaching 80 years old. Do you expect the first WCC to be operational by 2025?

Admiral FAGAN. We appreciate the funding and support in the fiscal year 2024 President's budget. Ninety-eight million dollars will provide for two Waterways Commerce Cutters with long lead-time funding for an additional two. This begins to help us replace, as you said, those aging cutters.

We also have on our UPL an additional \$48 million for home port investments that will be needed as we field those cutters. We are on contract, and look forward to begin building the Waterways Commerce Cutters. They are not a particularly complicated cutter, and should begin to come into operation fairly quickly. They are critical to our Nation's economic security, the \$5.4 trillion of mari-

time commerce, economic prosperity that the Nation enjoys, and the engine for much of that is the internal waterways, the rivers and the countries, in addition to our ports.

So, getting that Waterways Commerce Cutter built and into operation is a priority, and we appreciate the budget support for that. Thank you.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Commandant, the Port of Los Angeles has stated that they face over 40 million cyberattacks per month. At the same time, Chinese-manufactured cranes have the potential to do some sort of surveillance—not that I know what it would be, but they could gather information on the goods and services being performed at the ports.

So, do you see an additional resource for cyber, including R&D funds, to improve capabilities? Can you talk about that?

Admiral FAGAN. The U.S. Coast Guard, in our regulatory agency role, as we work with port facilities, ships in our ports, cyber is part of that remit and oversight.

We have been on a path of investment as an organization, both in cyber experts—we have recently established a cyber specialty in our enlisted ranks. We have been hiring civilian professionals at the district level who not only understand the maritime transportation industry, but are also experts in cyber as we work alongside our CISA counterparts within DHS to ensure that the Nation has the cyber expertise and cybersecurity needed, and we are focused in our role in the maritime realm in that regard. Thank you.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. OK, so, my time is gone, so, I will yield back nothing.

I recognize you, Mr. Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thought you were going to yield the chairmanship, so, I got excited there for a minute.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CARBAJAL. Admiral Fagan, June will mark 1 year since you assumed the Commandant position. At that time, you vowed to do a thorough review of the Coast Guard's policies in an effort to attract more servicemembers, increase diversity, address mental health, and generally make life better for our Coasties. Can you share how that is going and any policy changes that you have made or are working on making?

Admiral FAGAN. We have embarked on a substantial review and update of many of our workforce and talent management systems and processes. We currently operate an up or an out system, as the other Services do, where you take junior people with no experience in at the bottom, and progress them through a career to gain experience and professional requirements.

We have begun doing things like agile "A" school. We recently had a member join the Coast Guard who was a credentialed paramedic, so, substantial medical training, licensing credential. That individual came to us, completed boot camp, and when we sent them to our medical training school, we worked to develop a customized program to acknowledge the substantial experience the individual already had, and speed them out to the fleet. The member is currently serving the clinic in Station New York much sooner than we would have been able to, otherwise.

So, that is just one example of increasing flexibility, nimbleness, and recognizing the talent pool that we are drawing into the Service as we continue to focus on our recruiting needs. Thank you.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Master Chief Jones, issues faced by enlisted Coasties are often different from those of officers. I was an enlisted in the Marine Corps. What are the top three concerns or issues you hear from enlisted members, and what is the Coast Guard doing to address those issues?

Master Chief JONES. Congressman, routinely, no matter where we travel in the Coast Guard, the top three issues that I hear are: access to available and affordable housing; access to mental and physical healthcare; and then just kind of lumped in on the third is just general overall cost of living, whether it be base pay, whether it be affordable childcare, and those types of approaches.

So, we have many things that we are working on when it comes to the housing. There are some areas, smaller, more remote areas where we are investing in Coast Guard-owned housing. There are areas where we do have the availability of access to DoD base housing, working in cooperation with access there. And the other areas where it is not available, there is not military housing there, working with DoD to ensure that we have comparable housing allowance rates to afford our members the housing they deserve.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Admiral Fagan, with the passage of the Safer Seas Act, the Coast Guard is tasked with implementing several new authorities and requirements for industry. Prompt implementation and enforcement is extremely important.

Separately, the Coast Guard has yet to implement the man-over-board requirements included in the CVSSA 13 years ago. I know that was before your time assuming the Commandant position.

When should we expect to see these regulations?

And can you commit to an expeditious implementation of the Safer Seas requirements? I would say 13 years is a long time.

Admiral FAGAN. I commit to continuing to work through the regulatory process. I know how challenging regulatory work is. It is important work. We have a role in it. I commit to you to continue to advance that important work.

Passenger vessel safety and ship safety is critical, and the Coast Guard absolutely has a role in moving critical issues, such as the one you mentioned, forward.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Is there any way to expedite that a little bit to see the end of the tunnel?

Admiral FAGAN. So, I will ask my staff to come back and give you a more realistic timeline on when we could expect to see that come to a closure. But I agree, we have been at it for some time, and we need to continue to move that regulatory project forward.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Great. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Babin, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you very much.

And thank you, Admiral.

And Mr. Jones, thank you so much for being here, Master Chief.

From protecting our ports and waterways to assisting our communities during hurricanes, the Coast Guard is a well-known, vital component of my district in southeast Texas and the gulf coast. I proudly represent both Coast Guard Sector Houston-Galveston and Air Station Houston, each housed at Ellington Field in southeast Houston.

Admiral Fagan, my first few questions are for you. If we can't get through everything, I hope you don't mind that I will have them submitted.

As the Coast Guard looks to transition to an MH-60 rotary-wing fleet, I understand that the Coast Guard is slowly phasing out many of its aging MH-65s, with the intention of reducing its overall rotary-wing fleet from 146 to 126 aircraft.

Air Station Houston currently hosts three MH-65 Dolphin helicopters. I understand the current plan is to phase these three helicopters out and replace them with just two MH-60s. While I recognize that the MH-60 is a very capable platform compared with the MH-65, I have concerns that reducing the number of airframes in service may impact the Coast Guard's operational capabilities.

Presumably, with fewer aircraft at an air station, it would be more challenging to respond to multiple search and rescue missions, drug interdictions, or patrols, given that a single helicopter can only be in one place at one time. And I don't anticipate drug runners will be idling their boats while they wait for the helicopters to arrive. We can't ask folks to just tread water while they await assistance.

How does the Coast Guard plan to maintain its operational capabilities with less operational assets?

Admiral FAGAN. We are in the process of transitioning away from the H-65 fleet of aircraft. They have definitely reached their age limits. And so, there is an imperative around moving to a single fleet of H-60 helicopters. These aircraft have far more range and speed than the helicopters that they are replacing. And so, continuing the funding support necessary to field 60s becomes critical, and we appreciate where we are with it.

We have got a request in the UPL for \$113 million to field additional 60s. Right now, we have indicated a transition to at least 127, but we continue to look at the helicopter fleet we have in place now, what the capabilities are that the new 60s bring into the mix, and then understand that we do have an obligation to continue to meet response times, search and rescue requirements for the American public. This is lifesaving work, and we are committed to meeting those requirements. We continue to work towards identifying what that right number and mix looks like.

Dr. BABIN. OK. In a report shared with the committee last May regarding the Coast Guard's interdiction of illicit drugs in transit zones, the report shares that the Coast Guard was able to intercept about 10 percent of the cocaine flow coming into the United States. In the report, the Coast Guard notes that the level of effort toward this mission is assessed as adequate, given the boundary conditions of balancing the execution of other statutory missions and work-force and material readiness.

I assume the Coast Guard is not satisfied with a 10-percent interdiction rate. My takeaway from that is that you have too few

resources to adequately carry out your growing mission set. What are some of the factors that would improve the Coast Guard's ability to carry out its drug interdiction mission, and would you acknowledge that additional surface assets could help the Coast Guard improve its mission effectiveness?

And if so, why does the President's budget not include resources for additional FRCs?

Admiral FAGAN. The counternarcotics mission that the Coast Guard conducts on behalf of the Nation requires a force package of asset types: ship, over-the-horizon pursuit boat, helicopter with airborne use of force capacity. Fielding new assets that are more reliable and don't experience the unplanned maintenance periods that the current aging fleet of helicopters and ships are experiencing is a priority for the Service, that the ships and equipment we have out on vector are more reliable.

We continue to partner with other international partners in engagement to ensure that we are meeting that mission demand. The FRCs have been an incredibly helpful platform as we meet our counternarcotics mission.

Dr. BABIN. OK, thank you.

We are going to have two rounds today, is that right, two rounds of questions? OK. Well, because I have got some for the master chief, too. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Garamendi.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations, this being your first—not your first hearing, but your first one on readiness and the state of the Coast Guard.

When we were chatting a couple of months ago, we covered a whole series of issues. In my previous tenure on this I got to be known as somebody that was concerned about icebreakers. Could you bring me up to date on the status of the heavy icebreaker that presumably is being built?

Admiral FAGAN. We are on budget, on contract for a Polar Security Cutter. The 2024 budget includes \$170 million, which will be long lead-time material for a third Polar Security Cutter.

The yard that we contracted with was recently purchased. It is now Bollinger Mississippi. We continue to work closely with the yard to get to the correct level of maturity on detailed design.

Mr. GARAMENDI. You are being—excuse me for interrupting. Tell me exactly what is happening. Put the happy talk aside. This is not going well.

Admiral FAGAN. We are——

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. The original contractor went belly up. You have got a new contractor in. There are all kinds of design problems. Lay it out here so that we can participate in solving the problem.

Admiral FAGAN. I am confident in the design, and I am confident in the yard.

We have got work to do to mature that design. We have not built an icebreaker in this Nation since the mid-1970s. This is an incredibly complex ship to build. The steel thicknesses, the scantlings will take effort to ensure that the design is at the right level of maturity.

If we begin constructing before there is an appropriate level of design, that will continue to delay reaching full operating capacity with the vessel downstream. We are engaged with that yard, and in the planning process through the Integrated Planning Office with the Navy. This is a weekly conversation. Everyone understands the sense of urgency. This is a critical national security need for the country. We need icebreaking capacity as a Nation. We are an Arctic nation, we need that icebreaking capacity in the Arctic, and we are committed to working with the yard.

I am 100 percent confident in the design as we begin to build it, that it will be the capability that the Nation needs.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So, when will the design be completed?

Admiral FAGAN. I continue to—I don't have a—I would give you a date if I had one. I don't have a definitive date from my team. I am hopeful we will have one soon. As soon as we have that, I will share it with the committee. And once we have got that level of design maturity, we will begin to put estimates around what the actual—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. So, we don't know when the design is going to be completed. Do you have some idea in which decade it might actually be built?

Admiral FAGAN. The design will be completed soon. I am optimistic. Once we begin to build the ship, it is a complex ship, and it will take a number of years to build.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So, which decade?

Admiral FAGAN. I do not want to put a date out there. Once we have the detailed design, it will be several years, 3-plus, to get the completion on that ship.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So, what is your interim plan?

Admiral FAGAN. We have money, if it is appropriated in the President's budget, for \$125 million for a commercially available icebreaker. If it is appropriated, we are excited about what that capability brings to the Nation. We would operate it on—we would operate that icebreaker, and look forward to working with the committee for bringing that—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. So, you have identified an icebreaker that is out there for sale?

Admiral FAGAN. There is an icebreaker available. Should we receive an appropriation, we will continue to work to see what is required to acquire that.

Mr. GARAMENDI. We have been at this a long time in this committee, and the inability of the Coast Guard to get this even started is a major national security problem. And frankly, your answers are not satisfactory. I would hope that this committee would be given specific detail.

You didn't tell us where that ship is. Have you looked at renting, leasing long-term icebreakers?

Admiral FAGAN. There is one U.S.-constructed, commercially available icebreaker. We have worked with the committee for language to ease the acquisition of that icebreaker. When we have considered leasing of other icebreakers, it does not create either greater speed or reduced cost. And so, with an appropriation, working to acquire a commercially available icebreaker is the most, sort of, cost and time expeditious way forward for the Nation.

Mr. GARAMENDI. How many icebreakers do we need?

Admiral FAGAN. I recently signed out a fleet mix analysis that indicates we need eight to nine icebreakers.

Mr. GARAMENDI. And you have one under construction, the design of which is not yet complete. You are talking about purchasing another icebreaker from—and we happen to know the company, so, no secrets around here.

Do you have any idea what it will take to make that purchased icebreaker useful for the Coast Guard?

Admiral FAGAN. The budget reflects \$25 million to bring that vessel into initial operating capacity. We continue to work to estimate what out-year cost will be to support—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. So, the need is somewhat near 10 icebreakers.

Admiral FAGAN. So, we have a polar security contract, commercially available icebreaker *Healy*, which is the medium icebreaker currently in operation, and *Polar Star*, which is our heavy icebreaker. Those two are in full operation now.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Mast.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, Admiral and Master Chief, for being here today. I look forward to asking you all a few questions. And I want to get into the idea of “equitable” to begin with.

And so, Admiral, I would just start with a question in this way. As you are onboarding new Coasties, would you say that it would be equitable if the goal was three males for every one female? Would you say that would be equitable for onboarding?

Admiral FAGAN. I am onboarding talent. I am onboarding the best talent that I can hire. I would like that talent to be diverse, but I am hiring talent that meets the requirements to serve the Nation. There is not—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. I commend you for it. Best man, best woman for the job. Absolutely.

Admiral FAGAN. Best individual for the job, absolutely.

Mr. MAST. But in terms of goal for number?

Admiral FAGAN. There is no goal for number. I want the best talent, the most diverse talent that I can field. I have a number—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. OK, I am going to—

Admiral FAGAN [continuing]. That I need to meet for my readiness—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. I am going to ask this slightly differently then, because my goal really isn’t talking about the equity of your force right now. It is about the equity of this bridge and this waterway that you are looking at here.

[Slide]

Mr. MAST. I will start with my colleagues, then. Let me ask my colleagues. If I got 5 minutes and you all got 2 minutes, would that be equitable? Mr. Garamendi.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Your questions have always been so brilliant. I am happy to yield.

Mr. MAST. But would me getting 5 minutes and you getting 2 minutes, would that be equitable for our timeframe on this committee?

Mr. GARAMENDI. As long as you are asking the questions, I am willing to give you the time.

Mr. MAST. You are willing to give me more time, make it more equitable for me? I appreciate it. Thanks for working with equity for me.

Chairman, you care to weigh in? Would half of us getting 5 minutes and others getting 3 minutes, would that be equitable for time usage?

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. I don't think you have enough variables.

[Laughter.]

Mr. MAST. I don't know what that means.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. I don't know what yours mean.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Babin, you chimed in.

Dr. BABIN. It wouldn't be equitable.

Mr. MAST. No.

Dr. BABIN. Somebody would squawk.

Mr. MAST. They would. This is Washington, DC, and we have a habit of not being common sense here. Equitable is 50/50. Would you agree?

Admiral FAGAN. In the context that we are talking—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. What are we talking about, ma'am?

Admiral FAGAN. So, I am committed to a full and transparent process. I am committed to ensuring that the equities of the users are considered as we work to create opportunity for both user groups.

Mr. MAST. Ma'am, equity is 50/50. And what we are looking at with this railroad bridge and this waterway is that you have a train company, a for-profit train company looking to run 32 trains a day over that bridge. And it takes a minimum of 18 minutes just to get that bridge to go from open, where boats can go through, to closed to back open again, when boats can go through again.

And if you do the math on that—and they are looking to do that over a 15-hour window of the day—then what they are doing is they are closing off the waterway 9½ hours of the day, 9½ hours out of 15 hours. Is that equitable to the community whose resource that is?

Admiral FAGAN. We are in a rulemaking process with regard to the permitting on this bridge.

Mr. MAST. But is it equitable, ma'am, that a community gets 5 hours out of 10 hours? Is that equitable?

Admiral FAGAN. The waterway users—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. Ma'am, let's be common sense here. Don't filibuster my time, and let's be common sense. Is it equitable that the community that lives in and around this waterway, this very busy waterway, gets 5 hours out of 15 hours? Is that equitable?

Admiral FAGAN. The waterway users are entitled to their access to navigation.

Mr. MAST. Yes.

Admiral FAGAN. The bridge user is entitled to their access to the bridge. How that schedule is created will matter. The waterway users may have higher demand during certain periods of the day. And the—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. But I will mention right now you are not doing a study to determine that. You did a Waterway Access Management Study back in 2017, which you all have chosen to ignore. I will throw that in right now.

I am very glad that we are doing a second round, because we are going to talk more about this. But would it be equitable—maybe we could answer this. Let's do it a little bit more on the numbers. If the community got 1 hour of time and the trains got 14 hours of time, would that be considered to you nonequitable? Can we at least say that, 1 versus 14 is nonequitable?

Admiral FAGAN. We are committed to a fully transparent process—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. That is not an answer to my question, ma'am. Can you at least agree that the community only getting 1 hour out of a 15-hour timeframe would not be equitable for that community? You can't agree to that?

Admiral FAGAN. I want to understand the use pattern and data so that we can create a dynamic schedule that allows both user groups the access they need.

Mr. MAST. Would that include doing a Waterway Access Management Study?

Admiral FAGAN. The test deviation will create that data for us. We will simultaneously—it will be a 6-month time period. We will understand how many of the recreational users, and what the train schedule is, and will work to incorporate that—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. So, Mr. Chairman, just to be clear here, I would ask your assistance in getting an answer. Would 1 hour out of 15 be considered not equitable? Can we at least agree on that? That is not equitable, 1 out of 15 is not equitable. Can you help me get an answer, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. No.

Mr. MAST. No?

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. No.

Mr. MAST. I am not surprised. Well, I am happy to keep going. I am enjoying it. How about 2 hours? Would 2—

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA [interrupting]. OK, time is expired.

Mr. MAST. OK. All right. You didn't say that before.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Auchincloss.

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS. Thank you, Chairman.

Admiral, welcome. Foreign Policy recently published an article entitled, "U.S. Coast Guard is Helping Southeast Asians Protect Their Seas," which states that the economic activities of all of Southeast Asia's waters are claimed as coastal state jurisdictions, there is little the Coast Guard can do to provide direct enforcement activities, and its maritime security activities are pretty much limited to capacity building and diplomatic actions.

We have seen elsewhere that the Coast Guard's assistance with maritime surveillance and law enforcement in the Indo-Pacific has solidified partnerships with nations in the region as the Chinese Communist Party and the PLA look to militarize the South China Sea and otherwise interdict eastbound transpacific shipments.

How can the Coast Guard work with Southeast Asian allies or nonallied nations to increase your presence and the utility of your ships there?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you. We work closely with a number of key partners and allies throughout the Indo-Pacific and Oceania. One of the great benefits of the Coast Guard is our people-to-people engagement beyond—and I will talk to the large ships here in a minute.

Mobile and maritime training teams sent to a nation to help them, whether it is small engine repair, learning how to repair small engines, conduct fisheries operations in their own exclusive economic zone, or ship rider agreements where we take an individual from that nation—recently, Fiji would be an example, we have a bilateral ship rider agreement with Fiji, our ship in the area, a Fijian ship rider who brings their authority and expertise. And so, there are a number of key engagements that we do in the region.

We have asked for in the UPL—there is an ask for four additional FRCs that would increase—

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS [interrupting]. FRCs?

Admiral FAGAN. Fast Response Cutters, more persistent presence into the Indo-Pacific theater as a signal of where investment opportunities might be with regard to the Coast Guard as we counter those threats.

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS. Good. Well, as someone who once commanded a military-to-military training mission, I can attest that those can have huge leverage in the host countries' forces and training, and they can be highly effective.

What are you hearing from your sentinels overseas about the reception that the Coast Guard is getting in these activities?

Admiral FAGAN. The reception the Coast Guard gets is really exceptional. There is a far greater demand for those kinds of services than we have got capacity to provide. And it is not just true in the Pacific. Off the coast of Africa, our European partners and nation, this is one of the value propositions of the Coast Guard, are those kinds of engagements and that kind of partnership building.

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS. And are you working with or do you have a conception of how you fit into the Marine Corps Force Design 2030 for their first island chain stand-in forces?

Admiral FAGAN. So, we are part of the Maritime Force. Tri-Service Maritime Strategy was jointly signed out by my predecessor and the other Service Chiefs. We are committed to being part of the maritime arm of the U.S. Government.

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS. And you support Force Design 2030?

Admiral FAGAN. I am going to talk to it from the Coast Guard's perspective, which is our contribution is in that partnership capacity building. The work we do in the competitive space, short of conflict, we field ships that are operationally ready and at the same level of readiness as the Navy, particularly as we operate in the Pacific.

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS. Final question for you also related to the Indo-Pacific—slightly different, though. If I understand correctly, Admiral, earlier in your career, you helped put together the International Ship and Port Facility Code. Do you see any ability for that code to be applied or updated to help with ports screening for gray market or other illicit imports of Russian oil in violation of the price cap that has been put into place, particularly Indian ports?

Admiral FAGAN. That is an interesting question. It is not one that I have considered. We will come back to you on what might be possible with regard to the current ISPS code and that particular problem set.

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS. I would welcome your thoughts on that. It sounds like you have got a rich history in working on it.

In the final 30 seconds, Master Chief, for you in terms of workforce and recruitment, how much have you explored, given this new generation's, maybe, skepticism of 30-year-long careers in one organization, helping them envision the skills that they get in just 4 to 5 years of working in the Coast Guard, and how that can translate into the private sector. Is that part of the value prop you are trying to put out there?

Master Chief JONES. Yes, sir. Thank you for that. And it is—something that we talk to is, the same studies would tell you that an older generation values that 30 years with one company, the value that that leads, and that the younger workforce coming in today likes something new and exciting every few years.

What I talk to a lot is the fact that don't we, as the U.S. Coast Guard, offer both? We offer the opportunity to come in and have to do something new and exciting every few years, as well as that invested into that 30- to 34-year career.

Mr. AUCHINCLOSS. I yield back, Chairman.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Ezell.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank everybody for being here today.

I know the Coast Guard plays a vital role in hurricane response and port security.

I am also proud of the work that the shipbuilding industry does to modernize the fleet on the Mississippi gulf coast.

The Coast Guard continues to be asked to do more than ever. I want to ensure that the 2024 budget addresses the concerns with the security of our maritime borders, the challenges to our national sovereignty in the Arctic, and the growing threats in the Indo-Pacific.

Admiral Fagan, infrastructure continues to be an issue within the Coast Guard. Does the Coast Guard have the resources needed to replace aging and inadequate buildings, hangars, and assets?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you. The infrastructure backlog needs of the Service are well known. My predecessors have spoken to them. The infrastructure investments reflected in the 2024 President's budget, coupled with our 2024 UPL, identified the areas of infrastructure greatest need. It totals about \$3 billion.

The organization, the force needs, reliable \$400 to \$500 million a year growth, 3 to 5 percent in that infrastructure investment to begin to enable time for planning and then execution in a way that allows investments for the new assets coming online, and also updates the backlog of aging and older infrastructure that we are operating some of the force from.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

Master Chief Jones, another issue—it is no secret, we have talked about that a little bit—is the workforce. A 2022 GAO study showed that the Coast Guard has a shortage of 400 marine inspectors. This lack of a workforce has affected its ability to conduct gas

carrier compliance exams. The same report recommended the Coast Guard conduct an assessment of adopting a risk-based approach for conducting these exams.

Is the Coast Guard still experiencing a shortage of marine inspectors, and do you believe the Coast Guard compliance program would benefit from applying a risk-based approach for petroleum and gas compliance exams?

Master Chief JONES. Mr. Congressman, across our workforce in every community we have, we face a workforce shortage. There is no one community that is 100 percent full, to include marine inspectors. And we are applying a risk-based approach, where we are starting to develop as we apply a risk-based approach to how we staff our units to perform the multitude of missions.

Mr. EZELL. Very good. So, you believe it would be helpful for Congress to make some changes to the law that would allow the establishment and implementation of a risk-based program for these inspectors to help address this issue?

Master Chief JONES. I would defer that expertise to somewhere else in the Coast Guard for that answer, sir.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, sir, for your willingness to testify.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Ranking Member Larsen, you are recognized for some questions.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I apologize for being late. I was on the floor, managing a piece of legislation. So, we will see everyone at 5 o'clock for one vote.

Admiral, good to see you again. We have talked a lot up at the Academy, and I know that I have a lot of things to repeat on that. But some things have happened since, including a discussion here on Capitol Hill about reverting back to fiscal year 2022 funding levels, which would have impact on a lot of things in the budget. And I was curious if the Coast Guard has done any analysis of what that would mean, if you had a fiscal year 2022 funding level, versus what was proposed in the President's budget?

Admiral FAGAN. If we were held in a fiscal year 2022 funding level, we would start with a \$500 million shortfall. With inflation, increased costs, that immediately begins to impact our ability to provide frontline operating services.

As we make budget choices and decisions, we prioritize that frontline operating capacity for the Service. And so, an ability to continue to field the major acquisitions, begin to work through some of the infrastructure backlog, all of that gets put at risk if we are held to a 2022 budget level. And frankly, it impacts readiness almost immediately for the Service.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes. So—but to put it another way, you can't point to a specific thing, but the fact is, you just will have that much less—fewer resources to do what we are asking you to do today.

Admiral FAGAN. We will be forced to make very difficult tradeoffs. The investments, the acquisition investments, these are step functions. You can't phase a little bit. It is an all or nothing. And very quickly, we will be faced with difficult tradeoffs, but we will work to preserve people, workforce, and frontline operating capacity. But that all gets put into question if we are held at that level.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes, OK. Thank you. Thanks. And then one of the questions I did ask is—and this impacts Washington State, if I could be parochial, even though I am the ranking member, if you don't mind, Mr. Chair—detrimental to mariners across the country, but certainly in my district and the State, is the crewing for the State ferry system and the backlog of mariner credentialing.

It is a core responsibility of the Coast Guard, but there wasn't money put in for a necessary upgrade to the system, so that the credentialing activities can happen sooner. Can you talk a little bit about what your plan is there?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes, we take our role credentialing and licensing mariners seriously. It is critical, not just to the operation of the Washington State ferry system, but, frankly, it is critical for national security that we have licensed and credentialed mariners.

We have signaled some money needs in the UPL. We continue to work forward to invest in a new state-of-the-art IT system, which will bring some efficiency into that licensing and credentialing. And we continue to move forward to be responsive to that need.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. OK. And finally, I had a great opportunity at the Academy to sit with many of your cadets, including eight, I think, from the great State of Washington, and I very much enjoyed it. But what struck me is that the various groups on campus at the Academy, it is cadet-driven discussions, and cadet-driven actions on the need for diversity. It is not coming from the top. It is not coming—I am sure you are supportive, but these are cadet-driven activities who—they all recognize the need for a more diverse workforce, and certainly a more diverse workforce within the Coast Guard.

But still, there is a—probably now that we are catching up to this, it is going to be a couple of years before that diversity is reflected in the leadership. But how do you foresee that diversity that exists clearly at the Academy eventually working its way up into the broader leadership in the U.S. Coast Guard to reflect the face of the United States?

Admiral FAGAN. The Coast Guard Academy, you saw it when you interacted with the cadets, we are about 45 percent women in the cadet corps. And part of the reason that matters, one, diverse workforces outperform nondiverse workforces.

One of the studies we have done recently reflected that there had been a disparity rate between—graduation between men and women graduates at the Coast Guard Academy. When we crossed the 25-percent threshold, that disparity rate in graduation diminished.

So, now, as an organization, and as I focus on workforce management, talent management, it is in eliminating barriers for those who have joined us to continue to serve: women, minority males. What is good for women is good for the workforce, and it creates opportunity for anyone that sees themselves serving in the Coast Guard.

And I have got a sense of urgency around some of the human relations talent management work that we have got in front of us to ensure we retain that talent that is at the Academy.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you.

And just one more note, if you don't mind, Mr. Chair.

Please apologize to Cadet King for the grilling I gave him when I inspected his room, if he is recovered. I hope he has. If he hasn't, I apologize.

[Laughter.]

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you so much. I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Van Drew.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank both of you for being here. It is good to see both of you again.

And I just would tell the committee that we have a wonderful relationship in Cape May with the Coast Guard. It is integral and actually woven into the thread of our society in Cape May County. And people truly do love you down there. And it is good to see you again. And we are a Coast Guard community, which is also a big deal down there, which is a special designation given to certain communities, which we appreciate.

So, my focus on this first round of questions today will be on our continued investment in the United States Coast Guard Training Center Cape May—and yes, I want to be a little parochial, too—and the Coast Guard's new recruitment campaign. My questions are directed both to the admiral and to the master chief. Thank you both for your service to our country, by the way.

In 2022, Congress appropriated \$60 million to construct new barracks at Training Center Cape May. Can you please provide a status update on the design and on the engineering of the barracks, and when we might expect to break ground on phase 1 of the project?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes, thank you. We appreciate the enduring support and all of the support that the community of Cape May gives to us and our recruits as they go through our single session source for our enlisted workforce.

And we are working to break ground, hopefully in late 2025, on that first barracks project that we have been appropriated for. The next priority after that is the multimission building. And then there will be additional needs. We have done an infrastructure development plan that will help to lay out the way ahead for the investments that we need in Cape May, but we should break ground on that barracks in late 2025.

Dr. VAN DREW. Great. And everything seems to be going pretty well?

Admiral FAGAN. I have not heard otherwise; everything seems to be on track. It is critical that we provide a safe, state-of-the-art environment for our young recruits as they come through that training program there, and we are looking forward to it, to doing that for them.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you. Last year, Congress authorized the second phase of the barracks project for an additional \$60 million. In the fiscal year 2024 budget request, the Coast Guard also highlighted the need for an indoor training facility at the training center. Both this committee and I have supported appropriating these projects this fiscal year.

Can you please state your case for why these projects are priorities for the Coast Guard and why Congress should move to fund them now?

Admiral FAGAN. Cape May is our sole entry point for the enlisted force, and we owe them a safe environment to train and become young Coast Guard members. The need for the multipurpose training facility is really an acknowledgment to: it can get very hot in Cape May, and it can get very cold in Cape May. And 40 percent of the year, those weather extremes impact our ability to train. You can still run 1½ miles indoors in the facility we have, but it is 90 laps around that gym. This is not a state-of-the-art experience for young people that are coming in to the world's best coast guard.

After the multipurpose building, barracks so that, again, people have a safe, state-of-the-art place to sleep as they work through their training.

Dr. VAN DREW. And it is the only training center, correct?

Admiral FAGAN. It is our only training—

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. In the country.

Admiral FAGAN [continuing during interruption]. Force, yes.

Dr. VAN DREW. In the United States of America.

Admiral FAGAN. The Navy operates a similar facility in the Great Lakes, but this is our sole source.

Dr. VAN DREW. OK, thank you. Finally, I would like to give you the opportunity to speak on the Coast Guard's new "Protect, Defend, and Save" campaign. Can you please describe how this is different from past recruitment efforts, what the changes are?

Admiral FAGAN. The Protect, Defend, Save, and the new logo, it is a tertiary logo. There is no intent to change the shield, the anchor and shield, the racing stripe, the iconic—

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. That was the concern, right?

Admiral FAGAN. No, those are primary and secondary symbols that will remain and really speak to the core of our heritage and who we are.

The new symbol is targeted to young people, the 18- to 25-year-olds who we are looking to recruit. We did a lot of marketing towards that group of people with that particular symbol. As we have gained support for marketing dollars, advertising dollars, we are going to the young people on gaming websites and other—this is not a large commercial on night-time TV. That is not where the young people are. And so, that symbol—a more focused targeting of our advertising dollars and strategic dollars, it is really designed at the workforce we are trying to recruit.

Dr. VAN DREW. Is there anything you would like to see in the next authorization to help with recruitment?

Admiral FAGAN. We appreciate the support that we have continued to get, and will continue to signal where our investment needs are. Increasing recruiter capacity, opening recruiting offices, expanding the JROTC program, marketing and reaching young people where they are are all things that we have had support on, and will likely need additional support, and appreciate what the committee has been doing.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you.

I yield back, Chairman.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Ms. Scholten.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Admiral Fagan, Master Chief Jones, thank you so much for joining us here today.

I represent miles of beautiful Lake Michigan shoreline that has an installation of the U.S. Coast Guard in Muskegon and Grand Haven. I recently had a chance to tour the facility. It was great speaking with the members and understanding a little bit more about the challenges that come with serving, including a 50-year-old cutter and drysuits desperately in need of replacing. The issues highlight the need for a robust Coast Guard budget to ensure our Coast Guard's men and women have what they need to keep people safe.

Another issue that Station Grand Haven highlighted was recruitment and retention. While this was before my time in Congress, one thing that I understand had a severe impact on the ability to recruit and retain was the 2019 partial Government shutdown. Master Chief Jones, how severely were Coast Guard families, particularly the enlisted members, affected by the 35-day shutdown? I understand the impact was fairly severe, but if you can talk to what it did for morale amongst servicemembers, knowing that they weren't going to be able to support their families, the uncertainty of that month, particularly while the other branches of the military were being paid?

Master Chief JONES. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman. It had a severe impact on the morale of the workforce.

More concerning is the potential mission impact that it has. When our sentinels come to work every day, if they know that things are taken care of at home, and they know that their families are safe and secure, they are able to focus on the job at hand and be more mission effective. And it was a tremendous impact.

We learned that one thing that will take our workforce to its knees is the unknown, and that unknown is what was scary for them.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. And do you continue to see it have an impact on recruitment and retention today, particularly around the stability issues?

Master Chief JONES. I don't know if I could draw a parallel to that to our recruitment today. I think in the immediate aftermath, it may have, but I cannot tell you definitively whether it does today or not.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Yes. One thing that we know is that stability is so important to the mission all around. Thank you for answering that question.

Today Representative González-Colón and I will be reintroducing the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2023, previously introduced by former Chair Peter DeFazio during the 2019 shutdown. This bill would ensure that the Coast Guard continues to be paid if other branches of the military are paid in the event of a shutdown.

Protecting our Nation both at home and on our coasts overseas, away from their families, is critical. Coast Guard members continued to show up every day for those 35 days, despite not knowing if their paycheck would be coming. For 35 days, almost 1,000 families did not receive childcare subsidies. Death benefits were not paid to survivors of Coast Guard members who died while on Ac-

tive Duty. And leasing for personnel housing—you mentioned earlier one of the most critical issues for Coast Guard men and women in Government-leased housing—were not paid. This simply cannot stand, and we are taking action to stop it. Thank you.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mrs. González-Colón.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to be here today. And yes, I am proud to be joining Congresswoman Scholten to introduce that bill, so, I am happy that she brought it down today.

I want to say thank you, Admiral Fagan and Master Chief—it is great to see you both—and, of course, the men and women who are part of the Coast Guard. And thank you for your service to our Nation.

In the case of Puerto Rico, we are no strangers to the Coast Guard's important role and mission, and we truly value the relationship with our Coasties at Sector San Juan, and all they do to keep us safe.

So, I want to focus on one of the issues that I am really concerned about, and that is specifically the maritime border security issues, specifically to the waters of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Over the last few years, we have seen an increase in drug and migrant activity around our islands.

In fiscal year 2022, the Coast Guard interdicted more than 2,300 migrants in the Mona Passage in the waters near Puerto Rico, a 200-percent increase when compared to fiscal year 2021 for the same area. And according to the data the Coast Guard shared with my office from fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2020, the known cocaine flow to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, either coming directly from South America or via the Dominican Republic, increased 115 percent, from 51 metric tons to 110 metric tons.

We have also seen a rise in violence associated with these events. In a recent Homeland Security Committee hearing, CBP AMO executive director of operations testified that Puerto Rico is now—I would like to quote him—“the most violent maritime threat vector of any location we patrol.”

And as you are probably aware, last November, a CBP marine interdiction agent was shot and killed and two others were gravely injured during an interdiction of a drug smuggling vessel off of the western coast of Puerto Rico. Just 2 months later, another gunfight during a vessel interdiction off the coast of Fajardo in the eastern part of the island resulted in the death of two drug smugglers.

And the reason I bring those issues here is just to highlight the significant threats we face in the Caribbean area from transnational criminal organizations and smugglers operating in the Caribbean, and the need to ensure a robust Coast Guard and Federal law enforcement presence in the region. For example, recently the island has been advocating for the Coast Guard to establish a formal permanent presence on the island, western and eastern part of the island, through new boat stations or sub-units. I think this is something we should look at closely.

And my question today will be, could you discuss the Coast Guard efforts to tackle transnational threats and smuggling activity in waters in the Caribbean jurisdiction, including whether any consideration has been given to deploy additional assets in the re-

gion or establish a formal presence in those areas beyond the current boat station in San Juan?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you. And we are absolutely committed to countering the TCOs and the illegal flows of drugs and migrants. And, certainly, as you have highlighted, the flows have changed as with regard to what is coming towards Puerto Rico.

We are working to build a more robust capacity at Base San Juan, which is a key hub for the region, and as we support ships and boats and aircraft. We have got Fast Response Cutters now in Puerto Rico. Those are newer assets, game changing for us in the vectors that you have talked about; fielding the new MH-60 helicopters we have talked about earlier; and boats, as well. And we look forward to continuing to work with you and our team at D7 to ensure that the Coast Guard assets are appropriately postured for the risk.

As risks change, often it is much more dynamic than we are able—and so, we will move ships and boats towards where the increased threat may be. We do that in the Florida Straits now, and we will continue to do that to ensure that Puerto Rico has the appropriate level of maritime safety and security that the Coast Guard can provide.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you. And one of the last questions that I have is that, according to the most recent annual performance report, the Coast Guard was only able to remove 5.4 percent of the total known cocaine flow in the maritime transit zone, well below the target of 10 percent. And those numbers are coming down. What is the biggest challenge the Coast Guard is confronting that prevents it from meeting the target drug removal rate, and has the increase in migrant activities impacted that resource?

Admiral FAGAN. It is a team effort, the counternarcotics effort. As we move to field the new ship assets that will be more reliable, the new helicopter assets that will be more reliable, it will help us stay on station more reliably.

Now, we experience unplanned maintenance days that take us off vector, and we are focused on the lifesaving work that we are doing in the maritime migration, particularly in the Florida Straits. Thank you.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you.

Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Let's see. Mrs. Peltola.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you, Chairman Webster.

Good afternoon. It is very good to meet both of you. Thank you for being here. I am the Member representing the State of Alaska, which, I don't have to tell you how enormous Alaska is, or all of the good work that you do there, especially with search and rescue and, really, just being a national security presence. And I know that that is not really your wheelhouse, but I think your presence is really critical in Alaska, with our adversaries being so close, and I understand doing missions in our waters, practice missions in our waters, so, I really appreciate all the work that you are doing.

Master Chief Jones, the fiscal year 2024 budget proposal includes—and I apologize if this question has already been asked—it includes an increase of 80 positions, 42 full-time positions, and \$15.5 million to enhance retention and support of your workforce.

And I just was wondering if you could provide some more details on that budget proposal.

Master Chief JONES. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman.

Those positions, we were investing in shore-based personnel that support our cutter operations for our maintenance assist teams and our weapons assist teams.

We are investing in bolstering our modern training capability to where we—sometimes the best training is brick and mortar, sometimes it is delivered in a virtual format. It is delivering the training that the units need on time where they are for the mission they are addressing.

We are continuing our efforts to transition to our electronic health record, which is a welcome transition, as well as those funds also fund the special trial counsel that was directed as per the 2022 NDAA.

Mrs. PELTOLA. OK. Thank you. Thank you so much. I am wondering if either one of you could answer what the Coast Guard is doing now to ensure mental health of your workforce and how that is reflected in your budget.

Admiral FAGAN. We continue to invest in medical capacity to improve access for mental healthcare. At every unit we visit, at every all-hands, the concern over access to mental healthcare is raised by our members and by their families.

We have signed an MOU with DoD to improve our access to mental health capacity and training for our own medical corpsmen. We have a Coast Guard support system, but we are working to update that contract so that it provides easier access for telehealth and mental screening, particularly around mental health. And we continue to leverage all tools that are available to us, and invest in the capacity that is needed to ensure the mental and emotional well-being of our force.

Mrs. PELTOLA. OK. The last thing I wanted to mention, there is a young man who serves as a AET-2 who wanted to remain anonymous, but I just wanted to share some sentiments that he shared with me. He said that, under your leadership, there has been an increase in baby leave for both parents for up to 3 months. There have been funds allocated for new childcare centers, and you have made it possible for new members with degrees to come into the Coast Guard at a higher rank. And the last sentiment here is that you are truly taking a new approach and changing things for the better.

So, I really want to commend you and your very professional team, and all the good work that you are doing for our Nation. Thank you so much.

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you.

Mrs. PELTOLA. I yield my time back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you. So, we have time for a little bit more questions, so, I will ask the first.

Master Chief, like other Services, the Coast Guard has fallen short—we have been talking about that—of recruiting targets of approximately 4,800 members. What is the major problem you see in enlisted ranks in the deficit of nearly 20 percent expected by 2025?

Master Chief JONES. Mr. Chairman, the major issue is just that the mission hasn't gone away. The mission is always there. And our sentinels each and every day are dedicated to getting the mission done. And we need more people to help them get that mission done to ease the burden on each individual person.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Can you talk about some of the ways the Coast Guard is working to attract qualified personnel, other than the ones that have been mentioned?

Master Chief JONES. Yes, sir. As the Commandant spoke to, it is investing in how we advertise. We are advertising in different ways, meeting people where they are for the workforce that we are trying to attract, getting into gaming communities, which is a large portion of the young generation that is out there, attracting them.

And what we are really doing internal to the Coast Guard with the workforce is really and truly a push to simply tell our story. What we have learned is when people learn about the United States Coast Guard, they want to be part of the United States Coast Guard. They see the value we offer. They truly fall in love with our mission. They are passionate about doing it.

We just have to do a better job of telling our story. And that is one charge that I have given to our chiefs throughout the Coast Guard, and I have given to each and every sentinel every day is to tell the story when—they are already out in the communities. They are involved in their communities. They are doing great things every day in their communities. And I ask them to almost not be quite so humble sometimes, to get out there and tell everybody, "Here is what I do every single day," and I think that story will help us resonate.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Do you think the deficit in any way affects—how does it affect the readiness and the ability to perform the mission?

Master Chief JONES. Just with the simple numbers. Like I said, we need more people to help us. But what I will tell you is—and we get to see this everywhere we go—the quality of people we have coming in through Training Center Cape May and the quality of people we have coming through New London are second to none. They are absolutely the best of what our country offers. We just have to double down on efforts to find more of them to come through.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Good testimony. OK, Mr. Mast.

Mr. MAST. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.

Master Chief, you just spoke about telling a story. And I have nothing but love for the Coast Guard men and women in my community. But I am going to tell you a story about what has been happening with Washington, DC, Coast Guard and Coast Guard Sector Miami.

Just now, ma'am, you committed to an equitable process, but you are unwilling to even acknowledge situations that would be not equitable at all, that literally just happened. Your folks from DC came into my office and made some of the most unfounded statements that anybody could make. They said, "Well, we believe that if we gave your boaters a 15-minute access to that waterway, they could squeeze 75 boats through that waterway in 15 minutes." Truly one of the most unfounded statements that—and when I told

anybody back in my community that statement, every one of them, their response was the exact same. They were using some version of swear words to say, "What in the world are they thinking about that?"

You all put forward a questionnaire about management of this waterway in which you asked, "Is a 15-minute hourly opening schedule sufficient for the community?" You didn't ask if 45 minutes would be sufficient for the community. You only asked if 15 minutes would be acceptable to the community.

You took the Waterway Access Management Study, something that was very substantial, done with a great amount of purpose, and you all said that you want to ignore the recommendations that are in that. That is a part of the story of the Coast Guard in my community right now.

I want to try some of these questions again for a moment. Maybe you will answer them.

If the Coast Guard—because the Coast Guard is deciding this—decides that they are going to say, "Brightline train, you can close down that waterway for 14 hours of a 15-hour window, and community that lives around there, you can have 1 hour of the 15 hours," would that be equitable?

Admiral FAGAN. I am committed to a full and transparent process. We need to let the data speak to understand how to ensure both users are able—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. Ma'am, you are ignoring your own data, are you not? You are ignoring the Waterway Access Management Study that you all did.

Admiral FAGAN. The—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. Yes or no? Yes or no?

Admiral FAGAN. I am not familiar with that study. I will—

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. You are familiar with this case, but you are not familiar with the study that you all did on it. Let that tell you about where the process is.

You won't look at the stuff—you knew you were coming in here, you knew that I was going to ask about this, and you are not familiar with the study that you all did? Think about that.

And you are telling me that you are going to do a study, but where are you getting the information from? Your folks told us. You are getting your information from the train company. You are not even getting your own information.

After your folks told us, "No, listen, we are going to ignore this study because we are going to do another study that is more recent. We want more accurate information." But you all changed your tune and you said, no, you are not going to do that, you are just going to get the information from the train.

Now, I have talked about the 32 trains that the Brightline is going to run. Again, it doesn't even count the 15 freight trains that already go over those tracks every single day. So, now you are talking about, what, 47 trains a day going over that bridge, largely in a 15-hour window of time, taking no less than 18 minutes. I was in the Army, but I can do simple Army math, and I can tell you that only leaves about 30 minutes of access for mariners in that community with those kind of numbers. Is that equitable?

Admiral FAGAN. We have a public comment process. I am committed to taking in all of the data, all of the public comments, and——

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. And was that public comment process where you all put forward skewed questions? And you even acknowledged that they were skewed questions, and went back and changed them because you acknowledged that they were skewed. That is not a fair and equitable process.

So, let's just try it one more time. Can you acknowledge that any situation of time management between the local community that you are looking at up there and the train company would be inequitable? Is there any version that you could say, listen, that would reach the level of not equitable for the community?

Admiral FAGAN. I am committed to access for both user groups, and will work with you and our team——

Mr. MAST [interrupting]. But access is not equitable. Having access is not being equitable. Having access, great. You got to come out on the waterway, you got some time there. You got 15 minutes out of an hour to get through there. That is not the same thing as equitable, ma'am.

And Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the time.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Van Drew.

Dr. VAN DREW. My second round of questions will focus on offshore wind and maritime navigation safety.

In 2011, the Coast Guard established the Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study Workgroup. The group was to determine whether the Coast Guard should create navigational fairways to mitigate maritime safety impacts of anticipated offshore energy leases.

In 2012, the workgroup published an interim report stating that they were "developing tools critical to evaluating the navigational safety risk resulting from different scenarios."

Admiral Fagan, do you stand by the Coast Guard's 2012 assessment that the tools and recommendations of the Port Access Route Study are important to mitigating navigational safety risk?

Admiral FAGAN. I am committed to a predictable, safe, transparent way forward. I acknowledge the frustration in the length of time it has taken for the rulemaking to come to completion, and we are working to do exactly that.

I am committed to fulfilling our responsibility to preserve safety of navigation as we work to balance the offshore wind energy leases, and safe, transparent operation of the fleet of vessels that also enjoy access offshore. And we are working hard to get the notice of proposed rulemaking over the finish line.

Dr. VAN DREW. It is not easy. The Coast Guard's modeling concluded in the fall of 2014, but "did not produce a model capable of determining the risk to navigational safety," which you know already.

As of 2014, there was still work to be done in developing a safety plan. In November—this is a timeline; if I go too quick, stop me. In November of 2015, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, BOEM, auctioned two lease areas off the coast of New Jersey to offshore wind energy developers. They finalized this lease on February 4, 2016, and it went into effect on March 1st of that year.

It was only on March 14th of that year, of 2016, that the Coast Guard published the final rule for the Port Access Study.

Admiral Fagan, did BOEM select that lease area auction itself and put that lease area into effect before the U.S. Coast Guard finalized its Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study Safety Recommendations?

Admiral FAGAN. We have an advisory role with BOEM. I will ask the staff to come out. I don't have the step-by-step process. I am committed to the process, committed to being responsive and transparent in that process. And I will ask the staff—

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. This is—just so you know, I am not trying to catch you or anybody on this, but that study should have been done before the lease was done to make sure it is appropriate to do what they want to do.

Specifically on the timeline, is this timeline accurate based on the dates that I described to you? And what you are telling me is you are going to have to go back and look.

Admiral FAGAN. Yes, I want to make sure I give you a technically accurate answer with regard to—

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. If BOEM decided to auction—and this is why this is so important—if BOEM decided to auction the New Jersey offshore wind leases before the Coast Guard finalized its recommendations—no criticism of you, but if they did, it is them I am looking at—then it is impossible that BOEM fully considered safety in their leasing decisions. And that is obvious; if they did this before you were done, how can they do that?

And in all honesty, this means that the offshore wind leases off the coast of New Jersey are actually illegal. And there is a real possibility here. Again, nothing on the Coast Guard. I just want to know the dates. And we have checked this out and investigated.

The fact will be of little comfort to the projects that are constructed. Navigating offshore wind will be difficult and dangerous. Both BOEM and the Coast Guard have determined that the offshore wind projects will—and I am quoting both the Coast Guard and BOEM—“potentially increase frequency of collision as shipping traffic maneuvers around offshore wind development.” And that is a quote from both. The Coast Guard stated this direct in its Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study, and it is in there. I have looked at it with my own eyes.

Can you confirm the Coast Guard's determination that offshore wind structures present potentially dangerous risks to maritime operators, a conclusion reached in recent Coast Guard Port Access Route studies?

Admiral FAGAN. Any time a fixed structure is put into the sea, it increases the potential for risk with ships and movement. Our role is to continue to ensure access and navigation, safety of navigation. We will continue to work to advise in that realm—

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. But it is a challenge. I mean, this is over 3,000 wind turbines, and it is over 2 million acres. I mean, this is a big project that is going to affect us forever. So, I would appreciate if you could get back to me with those specifics.

I will think you will find that everything I told you was accurate, which is problematic for this company that went forward before

they knew whether it would be safe or not, or what the ramifications would be.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. That concludes the hearing for today. Thank you to the witnesses for appearing. We appreciate that and look forward to talking to you in the future.

I ask unanimous consent that the record be open for 15 days.

[Whereupon, at 3:49 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM HON. SALUD O. CARBAJAL TO ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN, COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Question 1. Admiral Fagan, during the hearing I asked about the status of regulations for the new sexual assault and sexual harassment provisions in the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 and the long overdue Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act. Please provide clarity to the timeframe mentioned at the hearing including as to when are you starting.

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 1 (con't). In addition, please answer the following questions:

Question 1.a. If you need outside consultation, who are you consulting with?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 1.b. Do you think your rulemaking will delay the statutorily mandated timeline for vessel implementation?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 1.c. Can vessel operators move forward with confidence that their technology will comply?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. The MH-60s require more personnel to operate than other USCG helicopters. Will the USCG have enough personnel to operate an all MH-60 fleet?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3. Can the MH-60 operate on ALL of the USCG ships? Does it fit in all of the USCG land and ship hangars? If not, what are the USCG plans for those ships and air station hangars that cannot accommodate the MH-60 helicopter?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 4. Do both the MH-60 and the USCG's Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS), ScanEagle, fit on board USCG ships together? Has the National Security Cutter deployed and operated with a MH-60 helicopter and ScanEagle UAS? If not, what equipment will be left onshore and what would be the impact to a cutter that is not fully mission capable?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 5. Occasionally aviation fleets are grounded due to safety or maintenance concerns. Does the USCG have a plan to cover all statutory missions Coast Guard helicopters are used to support if the single helicopter fleet is grounded?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. BRIAN BABIN TO ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN, COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Question 1. As the Coast Guard looks to transition to an MH-60 rotary-wing fleet, I understand that the Coast Guard is slowly phasing out many of its aging MH-65s, with the intention of reducing its overall rotary wing fleet from 146 to 126 aircraft.

Air Station Houston currently hosts three MH-65 "Dolphin" helicopters, and I understand the current plan is to phase these three helicopters out and replace them with just two MH-60's.

While I recognize that the MH-60 is a very capable platform compared with the MH-65, I have concerns that reducing the number of airframes in service may impact the Coast Guard's operational capabilities.

Presumably, with fewer aircraft at an air station, it would be more challenging to respond to multiple search and rescue missions, drug interdictions, or patrols, given that a single helicopter can only be in one place at one time.

I don't anticipate drug runners will idle their boats while they wait for helicopters, and we can't ask folks to just tread water while they await assistance. Given that reality, how does the Coast Guard plan to maintain its operational capabilities with less operational assets?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. In a report shared with the Committee last May regarding the Coast Guard's Interdiction of Illicit Drugs in Transit Zones, the report shares that the Coast Guard was able to intercept about 10 percent of the cocaine flow coming into the United States.

In the report, the Coast Guard notes that the "level of effort toward this mission is assessed as adequate, given the boundary conditions of balancing the execution of other statutory missions and workforce and material readiness."

I assume the Coast Guard is not satisfied with a 10 percent interdiction rate. My takeaway from that is you have too few resources to adequately carry out your growing mission set.

Question 2.a. What are some of the factors that would improve the Coast Guard's ability to carry out its drug interdiction mission?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2.b. Would you acknowledge that additional surface assets could help the Coast Guard improve its mission effectiveness? And if so, why does the President's Budget not include resources for additional FRCs?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3. The Coast Guard and Navy are planning to invest up to \$11.8 billion to build and maintain three Polar Security Cutter heavy polar icebreakers to conduct missions in the Antarctic and Arctic. The first ship is "scheduled" for delivery in 2025–2026, but is expected to be delivered, at best, in 2028.

Can you provide a status update on our icebreakers? What is being done to address continued delays in completing the design of the Polar Security Cutters to begin construction?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW TO ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN, COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Question 1. May you provide a detailed timeline of activities which occurred under the Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study from 2011 to 2016?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. On what dates did USCG communicate both preliminary and final conclusions and recommendations of the Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3. Did the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's November 2015 auction for the New Jersey Wind Energy Area, as well as the finalization of the lease area on March 1st, occur chronologically before the U.S. Coast Guard finalized the Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study on March 14th of 2016?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 4. May you provide an account of interagency communications and coordination between USCG and BOEM from 2011–2016 related to the New Jersey Wind Energy Area?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 5. When does USCG anticipate the finalization of the Delaware Bay PARS?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION FROM HON. BRIAN BABIN TO MASTER CHIEF HEATH B. JONES, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD, U.S. COAST GUARD

Question 1. Master Chief, the Coast Guard faces recruiting challenges, most notably in its enlisted ranks. Can you talk about some of the lessons learned from other services in addressing this challenge? What is the Coast Guard doing to improve its recruiting efforts?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

