

**FROM DRUG INTERDICTIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN
TO NATIONAL SECURITY PATROLS IN THE
ARCTIC: EXAMINING U.S. COAST GUARD'S ROLE
IN SECURING THE HOMELAND**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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**FROM DRUG INTERDICTIONS IN THE CARIB-
BEAN TO NATIONAL SECURITY PATROLS IN
THE ARCTIC: EXAMINING U.S. COAST
GUARD'S ROLE IN SECURING THE HOME-
LAND**

Thursday, July 24, 2024

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
WASHINGTON, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Carlos A. Gimenez [Acting Chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Gimenez, Greene, Gonzales, Ezell, Luttrell, Strong, Brecheen, Crane, Thompson, Carter, Thanedar, Magaziner, and Menendez.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The Committee on Homeland Security will come to order. Without objection, the Chair may declare the committee in recess at any point. The purpose of this hearing is to examine the United States Coast Guard's role in securing the homeland.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement. Maritime trade is the engine of global commerce. A robust military presence on the high seas is essential to deter piracy and adversarial states ensuring this engine that runs smoothly.

The 17th Century English explorer, Sir Walter Raleigh, once wrote, "Whoever commands the sea commands the trade; whoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself."

Controlling the high seas has empowered nations throughout history, from Phoenicia and Athens to the Dutch Republic and the British Empire. This is true today just as much as it was thousands of years ago, yet the threat landscape facing our country grows increasingly complex with every passing year.

Cartels and smugglers, they exploit blind spots along our massive maritime border to ensure to traffic people and narcotics into our country. The People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and other geopolitical adversaries contest our laws and international norms through gray zone actions at sea.

Nation-states and non-nation actors increasingly utilize cyber space to attack, disrupt, and degrade our port infrastructure and the maritime transportation system that our economy depends on. That is why the United States must prioritize its ability to enforce laws, hold bad actors accountable, and protect life at sea.

During my time I learned—during time at West Point it is taught the importance of tailoring strategy to appropriately address the specific characteristics of each situation. Therefore, the United States Coast Guard is unique in its role in protecting our homeland and upholding our national sovereignty.

With its 11 statutory missions, the Coast Guard is a multifaceted actor that can conduct law enforcement missions, support the intelligence community, and build and maintain international partnerships. From the Gulf of Mexico to the Straits of Florida, from the Persian Gulf to the Bering Strait, and from the Western Pacific to the Eastern Seaboard, Coast Guard personnel operate surface, air, and unmanned assets, performing critical national security missions.

The Coast Guard performs exceptionally well in the most challenging environments on Earth and the demands for Coast Guard services at home and abroad is only increasing.

Unfortunately, the Coast Guard has critical manpower and asset needs in order to meet this growing demand. In the Caribbean, the Coast Guard is under severe pressure to interdict the massive waves of illegal immigrants leaving scant resources for counter-narcotics missions. This allows cartel activity to go unchecked.

In its partnership-building work with Pacific nations, the Coast Guard does not have enough people to maintain a consistent presence in areas where the PRC is poised to seize the initiative and impose its will upon smaller states that lack the means and governance structures to push back.

Like most of the military, the Coast Guard is struggling to recruit enough personnel to fulfill its complex missions. Last year the Coast Guard told Congress that they had missed their recruiting goals for the previous 4 years and earlier this year Coast Guard officials stated that they were short nearly 2,500 people. Ensuring that more high-quality individuals enlist and commission in the Coast Guard will provide the Service with the personnel necessary to carry out its broad missions at home and across the globe.

The Coast Guard is also in the process of replacing some of its aging surface and air assets, some of which have been in service since World War II. Of particular importance is the Polar Security Cutter, or the PSC, program, which will deliver 3 new heavy polar icebreakers to replace the Coast Guard's lone operational heavy icebreaker, which was commissioned nearly 50 years ago.

With Russia and the PRC challenging U.S. sovereignty in the Arctic and Antarctic, the United States must maintain a credible, persistent presence in the polar regions. During the past year-and-a-half our committee has heard from several Coast Guard officials about the multitude of threats, the unique capabilities the Coast Guard has to respond to these threats, and the pressing needs of the Service to ensure that they have the capacity to do so.

Thinking about the Service's current situation I am especially concerned about the systemic issues that threaten to undermine the Coast Guard's ability to fulfill its statutory mission requirements and protect the homeland. The Coast Guard has experienced major problems in administering its acquisition programs. For instance, the PSC program was initially supposed to have delivered

the first cutter by this year, yet construction of the first ship has not even begun.

Additionally, according to a Congressional Budget Office cost estimate that Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee that I chair and was requested by the Chair of the committee, the PSC program's cost will be almost 60 percent higher than the Coast Guard's current estimate. These shortcomings ultimately hinder the Coast Guard's ability to maintain a sufficient presence in critical mission areas.

Regarding personnel, the Coast Guard has severely damaged its standing with its handling of Operation Fouled Anchor and the wider issue of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and retaliation within the Service's ranks.

While I appreciate the on-going efforts to address the issues, the Coast Guard must earn back the trust of its service members and the American public. It is long past time for more accountability and an overhaul the Coast Guard's service culture.

In closing, the Coast Guard ensures that the United States can meet any maritime threat from criminal activity to nation-state aggression with appropriate and decisive force. To reiterate Sir Walter's words, "Control of the high seas enables our nation's prosperity and security." We must prioritize the mission of the Coast Guard. Our homeland security depends on it.

I thank our witness, the commandant of the Coast Guard Admiral Linda Fagan, for appearing before the committee today, and I look forward to her testimony.

[The statement of Chairman Green follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MARK E. GREEN, M.D.

JULY 24, 2024

Maritime trade is the engine of global commerce.

A robust military presence on the high seas is essential to deter piracy and adversarial states, ensuring this engine runs smoothly.

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Yet the threat landscape facing our country grows increasingly complex with every passing year.

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The People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and other geopolitical adversaries contest our laws and international norms through gray zone actions at sea.

Nation-states and non-state actors increasingly utilize cyber space to attack, disrupt, and degrade our port infrastructure and the maritime transportation system that our economy depends on.

That is why the United States must prioritize its ability to enforce laws, hold bad actors accountable, and protect life at sea.

During my time at West Point, I learned the importance of tailoring strategy to appropriately address the specific characteristics of each situation.

Therefore, I understand the United States Coast Guard's unique role in protecting our homeland and upholding our national sovereignty.

With its 11 statutory missions, the Coast Guard is a multifaceted actor that can conduct law enforcement missions, support the intelligence community, and build and maintain international partnerships.

From the Gulf of Mexico to the Straits of Florida, from the Persian Gulf to the Bering Strait, and from the Western Pacific to the Eastern Seaboard, Coast Guard personnel operate surface, air, and unmanned assets performing critical national security missions.

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Ensuring that more high-quality individuals enlist and commission in the Coast Guard will provide the service with the personnel necessary to carry out its broad mission at home and across the globe.

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To reiterate Sir Walter's words—control of the high seas enables our Nation's prosperity and security.

We must prioritize the mission of the Coast Guard—our homeland security depends on it.

I thank our witness, the Commandant of the Coast Guard Admiral Linda Fagan, for appearing before the committee today, and I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I now recognize the Ranking Member, the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Thompson, for his opening statement.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to our witness, Admiral Fagan.

Let me say that the flowers here represent a tragic loss for this committee, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee of Houston, Texas. As people have said yesterday and continue to say, she is a fierce advocate, or was a fierce advocate, for her community and she will be missed, not just by constituents, but also by this committee.

Again, welcome, Admiral Fagan. We are glad to have you. We are here today at a critical time for the Coast Guard. To ensure the safety, security, and stewardship of our Nation's waters, the Coast Guard is charged with carrying out a wide range of important missions. Its activities include everything from disrupting transnational crime in the Caribbean to search-and-rescue efforts off our shores to addressing the impact of human activity in the polar regions as ice caps recede.

Successfully achieving all that the Coast Guard is called upon to do has never been so complex. The threat of global adversaries, the impact of climate change, and an increase in illegal fishing pose significant challenges to the Coast Guard's mission. The Coast Guard must have a work force and fleet of unparalleled strength and readiness to meet this moment.

Yet we have learned that in the past the Coast Guard has not always treated its work force with respect, fairness, and transparency that it deserves. In fact, the Service has actively covered up assaults and discrimination. Through the Operation Fouled Anchor investigation we learned that the Coast Guard improperly handled dozens of allegations of sexual assault at the Coast Guard Academy over the course of 2 decades.

The Coast Guard allowed individuals accused of rape and other sexual assaults to avoid criminal investigation. Administrative punishments, if they happened at all, were as minor as extra work or lower class standing. As a result, some of the accused ascended to top roles within the Coast Guard and other branches of the military.

The Coast Guard inaction led to many victims leaving the academy after reporting their assaults, ending their hopes of a career in the Service. The Coast Guard failed to protect its own people and the damage caused is truly incalculable.

My heart goes out to every survivor who the Coast Guard failed to protect and my gratitude goes to those who have bravely shared those stories with investigators, reporters, Members of Congress, and the public.

The Coast Guard compounded the deep betrayal of its service members' trust by failing to fully and transparently disclose the results of its investigation to Congress, the public, or even the victims involved. I am particularly disturbed that the Coast Guard withheld information on Operation Fouled Anchor from this committee, given our concurrent investigation under my chairmanship into harassment, bullying, retaliation, and mismanaged investigation at the Coast Guard Academy. That investigation, which I led with my late colleague Oversight Committee Chairman Elijah Cummings, included voluminous document requests, transcribed

interviews with multiple Coast Guard senior leaders, and a joint committee hearing.

In addition, former Commandant Karl Schultz testified before this committee at a hearing in 2021 on the Coast Guard's culture and a need for accountability for misconduct. Throughout this period, the committee specifically asked the Coast Guard about sexual assaults at the academy, investigative processes, and whether Coast Guard leaders had actively covered up failures within the Service. Yet at no point did the Coast Guard provide us information about Operation Fouled Anchor until CNN began reporting on it last year.

Documents provided by the Coast Guard to the committee show that the Coast Guard leaders considered our investigation into the issues at the academy in deciding whether to disclose the Operation Fouled Anchor to Congress and still chose to hide the information. Admiral Schultz did not discuss it in our June 2021 hearing focused on the culture of the Coast Guard, nor did he raise it with me when we met privately on relevant topics. The Coast Guard's failure to disclose Operation Fouled Anchor in the face of the committee's oversight can only be described as deliberate and deceitful.

I recognize that the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general's investigation into the Coast Guard action is on-going, but I want to be clear. I expect those responsible for orchestrating this cover-up to be held accountable. It is imperative that the Coast Guard restore trust with its work force, Congress, and the public by changing the culture that allowed these events to occur and ensuring that they never happen again.

The Coast Guard rebuilding trust with its work force is all the more important because as with all our military branches the Coast Guard is facing a work force shortage. The Government Accountability Office reported last spring that Coast Guard was more than 4,000 members short and had missed recruiting targets over a number of years.

Though the Coast Guard has taken actions to address this work force shortage, including providing hiring bonuses to new recruits, more needs to be done. Today, I hope to learn how Congress can support Coast Guard recruitment and retention.

Finally, the Coast Guard's physical assets, its fleet and shore infrastructure, are aging and in need of replacement and repair. Despite the strategic importance of the Arctic region, the Coast Guard has only one heavy polar icebreaker and one medium icebreaker. Both are decades old yet the rollout of new icebreakers is delayed.

The Coast Guard also faces an enormous backlog of shore infrastructure improvements. In 2019, the Government Accountability Office reported it would take the Coast Guard 395 years to address its backlog of maintenance and construction projects absent increased funding. The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act signed by President Biden in 2021 provided the Coast Guard with \$429 million to address the backlog, but more is needed.

While I applaud Coast Guard's practice of making do with its available resources, I also know that Congress can help. One of the issues I have discussed today, rebuilding trust, increasing the work

force, and updating an aging work fleet and infrastructure portfolio, will be quickly or easily addressed.

Solutions will require the full attention and commitment of leadership, buy-in from the Coast Guard work force, and resources from Congress. I hope to hear from you today how the Coast Guard can meet the moment, address its challenges, and remain always ready.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JULY 24, 2024

We are here today at a critical time for the Coast Guard. To ensure the safety, security, and stewardship of our Nation's waters, the Coast Guard is charged with carrying out a wide range of important missions. Its activities include everything from disrupting transnational crime in the Caribbean to search-and-rescue efforts off our shores, to addressing the impact of human activity in the polar regions as ice caps recede.

Successfully achieving all that the Coast Guard is called upon to do has never been so complex. The threat of global adversaries, the impact of climate change, and an increase in illegal fishing pose significant challenges to Coast Guard's mission.

The Coast Guard must have a workforce and fleet of unparalleled strength and readiness to meet this moment. Yet, we have learned that in the past, the Coast Guard has not always treated its workforce with the respect, fairness, or transparency it deserves. In fact, the service has actively covered up assaults and discrimination.

Through the Operation Fouled Anchor investigation, we learned that the Coast Guard improperly handled dozens of allegations of sexual assault at the Coast Guard Academy over the course of 2 decades. The Coast Guard allowed individuals accused of rape and other sexual assaults to avoid criminal investigation. Administrative punishments, if they happened at all, were as minor as extra homework or lowered class standings.

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The Coast Guard rebuilding trust with its workforce is all the more important because—as with all military branches—the Coast Guard is facing a workforce shortage. The Government Accountability Office reported last spring that Coast Guard was more than 4,000 members short and had missed recruiting targets over a number of years. Though the Coast Guard has taken actions to address this workforce shortage, including providing hiring bonuses to new recruits, more needs to be done.

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None of the issues I have discussed today—rebuilding trust, increasing the workforce, and updating an aging fleet and infrastructure portfolio—will be quickly or easily addressed. Solutions will require the full attention and commitment of leadership, buy-in from the Coast Guard workforce, and resources from Congress. I hope to hear from you today how the Coast Guard can meet the moment, address its challenges, and remain always ready.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the Ranking Member.

Other Members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

I am pleased to have Admiral Fagan, the Commandant of the United States Coast Guard, testify before us today. I ask that our witness please rise and raise your right hand.

[Witness sworn.]

Mr. GIMENEZ. Let the record reflect that the witness has answered in the affirmative. Thank you and please be seated.

I would now like to formally introduce our witness. Admiral Linda Fagan assumed the duties as the 27th commandant of the United States Coast Guard on June 1, 2022. As Commandant she oversees all global Coast Guard operations and 42,000 Active-Duty, 7,000 Reserve, and 8,700 civilian personnel, as well as the support of 21,000 Coast Guard auxiliary volunteers.

Admiral Fagan previously served as the 32nd vice commandant and in several other critical roles within the Service as a flag officer. In addition, Admiral Fagan has served on all 7 continents, from Antarctica to Africa and in many ports along the way.

Admiral Fagan, I thank you for being here today. You are now recognized for 5 minutes to summarize your opening statement.

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

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you and good morning to the many distinguished Members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I ask that my written testimony be entered into the record.

Before I begin, I would like to express our sincere condolences on the passing of Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, a former Member of this committee, a strong supporter of the Coast Guard. Our thoughts are with all those who loved and knew her.

On behalf of the Service, thank you for your enduring support for the Coast Guard, our work force, and our families. We are especially grateful for the \$12.9 billion in discretionary funding included in the House Appropriation Committee's June mark-up. I am incredibly proud of our work force who are on the front lines every day saving lives, protecting our ports and waterways, defending our Nation, ensuring our economic prosperity.

You need look no further than the recent response to the Baltimore bridge collapse and the Lahaina wildfires to see our value and service to the American people. Around the globe, from the Middle East, where we are boarding ships and seizing Iranian-made weapons destined for Houthi rebels, from the Indo-Pacific, Arctic, and throughout the Western Hemisphere we protect U.S. national security, promote responsible maritime governance, dismantle transnational criminal organizations, and uphold the rules-based international order.

At home and abroad our crews, the heart and soul of the Coast Guard, put their lives on the line every day to protect, defend, and save. We do this with courage, character, and humility.

We are doing more than we have ever done and more is being asked of us. Now our work force is stretched thin and we are doing less with less. Our needs across the Service are at risk of outpacing our ability to operate in the exceptional ways that we do.

The Coast Guard needs more, and I know we need your support and it will start with my highest priority, modernizing our talent management system to recruit and retain the best and brightest. We have made difficult decisions to tailor some of our front-line operations due to the on-going personnel shortfall.

We are working hard to close the gap and early indications are that our efforts are paying off and recruitment is trending up. I ask for your support to continue to build on this momentum.

We need to provide our work force with the tools they need to be successful, modern ships, boats, and aircraft, and the infrastructure and systems to support them. We must address their basic personal needs, housing, child care, health care, so our crews can stand the watch with total focus knowing that their families are taken care of.

We also need maintenance budgets that actually cover our maintenance needs. Our projected ship maintenance budget will cover half of the planned projects next year, with similar shortfalls in our infrastructure and aircraft accounts. This causes us to defer maintenance, which drives up unplanned cost and disrupts work and training schedules, sidelines our cutters and aircraft, taking our crews away from operational missions where our Nation needs us most.

As you know, we have been hard at work strengthening the Service's culture to assure we are intolerant of any harmful behaviors. This is critical work. As I said earlier, our people are the heart and soul of the Coast Guard and our core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty define and guide all that we do.

Every member of our work force deserves a Coast Guard culture where each person feels safe, valued, and empowered and where they belong. A culture that is intolerant of the crime of sexual assault and any other harmful behaviors that undermine our mission and everything that we stand for. This is my expectation. It is the standard that we will hold ourselves to.

This is about having courage to hold ourselves to the highest standards through our core values every day, ensuring discipline and excellence in our actions and operation in all that we do. We are committed to that work.

Together I am confident we will build on our successes to meet the threats and challenges of the 21st Century as we remain the world's best Coast Guard. Thank you. *Semper Paratus*.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Fagan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN

JULY 24, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify. I am grateful for your continuing support of the United States Coast Guard. Today, I look forward to discussing how the administration's fiscal year 2025 budget request positions the Service to sustain recent strides in growing and supporting a resilient workforce, increases meaningful presence in the Indo-Pacific, enhances support for the maritime community, and delivers capable assets to the fleet, while building the Coast Guard of the future.

The Coast Guard remains the world's premier, multi-mission, maritime service responsible for the safety, security, and stewardship of the Nation's waters: we offer 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. This pivotal connection was highlighted on March 26, when the M/V DALI allided with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, resulting in the devastating loss of 6 lives and continuing impacts to the Nation's most significant port for light vehicles and other critical cargoes. We are working closely with Federal, State, and local partners to restore the flow of commerce in this vital waterway and enable efficient operation of nearby ports and the Marine Transportation System.

Last year, your Coast Guard navigated unique challenges presented by our increasingly connected and rapidly-changing world. In fiscal year 2023, the Service saved over 5,500 lives, assisted over 40,000 people, and removed over 212,000 pounds of cocaine and 54,000 pounds of marijuana with an approximate wholesale value of \$2.9 billion. It responded to 28 weather or climate disaster events, protected 3.5 million square miles of Exclusive Economic Zone, and boarded over 50 foreign vessels to suppress illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. In the same year, the Coast Guard maintained nearly 45,000 buoys and beacons across the Marine Transportation System and conducted over 10,000 waterborne patrols to protect critical infrastructure and key resources. It also provided support to U.S. Central Command to advance security cooperation, maritime security, and counter-piracy objectives in the Arabian Gulf, and deployed the Nation's only 2 icebreakers—the cutters *Polar Star* and *Healy*—to further U.S. geopolitical, security, and economic interests in the High Latitudes.

The Coast Guard continued to serve as a highly effective partner, uniquely qualified to lead the interagency in multiple capacities, including incident response and search and rescue. In June 2023, the Coast Guard led search-and-recovery efforts for the missing submersible *Titan* in the Northern Atlantic. In August, crews from Coast Guard Station Maui rescued 17 people fleeing the fires that devastated the community of Lahaina. Coast Guard personnel also deployed in response to Hurricane Lee and Tropical Storm Idalia, saving or assisting 16 lives and rapidly restoring trade across the Marine Transportation System.

The Service safeguards our Marine Transportation System, a vital part of U.S. economic prosperity and national security. In February 2024, the President signed

an Executive Order to bolster the Coast Guard's authority to directly address cyber threats and strengthen port security. To complement this action, the Service issued a Maritime Security Directive on cyber risk management actions for ship-to-shore cranes manufactured by People's Republic of China state-owned companies and published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on cybersecurity in the Marine Transportation System.

In addition to protecting our ports and maritime partners from evolving threats, we also began to expand our presence in the Indo-Pacific, a region vital to U.S. security, by homeporting the *Harriet Lane*, the Service's first dedicated Indo-Pacific Cutter, in Hawaii. This multi-mission cutter's presence in the region is already promoting maritime governance through meaningful engagements with regional allies and partners. During its first "Operation Blue Pacific" patrol, the *Harriet Lane* worked closely with Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, and other partners to complete numerous bilateral shiprider operations, advancing capacity building with island nations and upholding international rules-based order.

While I am incredibly proud of our Coast Guard Active Duty, Reserve, Civilian, and Auxiliary workforce and remain optimistic about our future, we must adapt to the growing demand for the Coast Guard in the face of evolving global threats. In order to transform our Service and continue to provide our unique capabilities to the American people, we need Congressional support.

The ability for the Coast Guard to generate sustained workforce and mission readiness is paramount to our ability to protect the Nation's maritime safety, security, and prosperity. The fiscal year 2025 President's budget provides needed investment in these areas and helps position the Coast Guard for the future.

GENERATE SUSTAINED WORKFORCE AND MISSION READINESS

Workforce Readiness

My highest priority remains modernizing 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 fostering a Service culture that attracts the best talent and empowers a resilient force of Coast Guard women and men ready to take on tomorrow's challenges.

The fiscal year 2025 budget requests \$160 million to bolster military and civilian pay and benefits; funding to enhance our culture through efforts related to integrated primary prevention (IPP), victim advocacy, anti-hate and anti-harassment prevention and response, and modernizing our officer evaluations system. Investments to expand our IPP program will promote prevention efforts across all harmful behaviors, to include sexual harassment and sexual assault, by facilitating the swift implementation of policies and procedures to ensure everyone experiences a workplace with enhanced protective factors and increased outreach. To further those efforts, support for our recently-created Enterprise Victim Advocate role—the first of its kind across the armed forces—will further advance the connection between victims of harmful behavior, stakeholder groups, and Coast Guard leadership. In addition to these strides for our workforce, the request provides \$7 million to bolster our workforce's support of the U.S. maritime community by fielding personnel to improve the Coast Guard's ability to combat sexual misconduct in the maritime industry and to support the transformation of the Mariner Credentialing Program.

Mission Readiness

The Coast Guard must continue to adapt to a constantly-evolving environment and remain resilient to change. The demand for the Coast Guard has never been higher; we continue to demonstrate our value across the globe but increasingly so in the Indo-Pacific, where our unique capabilities position us to effectively and meaningfully advance U.S. strategy. Through foreign partner interactions and work with regional organizations, the Coast Guard is a relevant, non-escalatory resource which strengthens maritime governance, the rule of law, and democratic institutions.

The fiscal year 2025 budget requests \$263 million to expand Coast Guard operations in the Indo-Pacific along 3 primary lines of effort: Increased Presence, Maritime Governance, and Meaningful Engagements. This investment includes the acquisition of 2 Fast Response Cutters (FRC) and the addition of a Marine Transportation System Assessment Team, a Maritime Engagement Team, and various regional liaisons and attachés, and will continue the Service's transition from episodic to persistent presence in the region.

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 fiscal year 2025 budget requests funding for the operations, maintenance, crew, and mission support elements for 6 FRCs; shoreside maintenance and support personnel for Offshore Patrol Cutters (OPC) No. 3 and No. 4; crew for Waterways Commerce Cutter No. 1; funds to support 4 hyperbaric recompression chambers; and crew, operations, and maintenance for 4 MH-60T helicopters and 8 Maritime Security Response Team boats. Additionally, the budget includes \$10 million for the operations and maintenance of newly-acquired or recapitalized shore facilities.

BUILD THE COAST GUARD OF THE FUTURE

I remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure the Coast Guard has the capable, modern assets necessary to meet evolving mission demands.

Surface

The 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). In October 2023, the Service christened and launched the first hull in the class, the *Argus*—we look forward to continued progress on this critical class of vessels. The fiscal year 2025 request provides \$530 million for construction of the seventh OPC and long lead time materials for the eighth cutter. The legacy assets the OPCs will replace have been workhorses for decades and continue to serve the Nation with distinction. Thirteen of these venerable cutters have been in operation for more than 50 years. The MEC fleet will only become more difficult and expensive to maintain, and we will continue to see decreasing readiness and operational availability.

The Service's other acquisition priority remains the Polar Security Cutter. In fiscal year 2025 we expect to rely on prior appropriations to continue construction of the first hull. In future years it will be important that the Nation continue to invest in the heavy polar icebreakers that the United States needs to protect America's sovereign interests in the polar regions. These cutters are national assets, and revitalizing the defense industrial base to produce this first-in-class ship is a necessary investment that will pay dividends for decades.

Some of our inland tenders have been in service since the 1940's, maintaining both fixed and floating aids to navigation for the Marine Transportation System—the 25,000 miles of rivers and navigable channels that support \$5.4 trillion in annual commerce and 30 million jobs. The fiscal year 2025 request for \$135 million supports program management, long lead time material for future hulls, and construction of 3 Waterways Commerce Cutters. 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, where they help ensure that some of America's most critical waterways remain navigable despite constantly changing conditions and water levels.

As we consider aging assets, one of the most critical elements of the Service's surface budget request is the In-Service Vessel Sustainment program. That request for \$148 million is vital to extending the service life of cutters and boats, including our 47' motor life boats, Coast Guard Cutter *Healy*—1 of the Nation's 2 polar icebreakers—the 270' MECs, our 175' coastal buoy tenders, and even our 418' National Security Cutters. These upgrades provide legacy assets with modern capabilities, repair wear and tear on major systems, and overall deliver incredible return on investment.

The FRC is an incredibly capable asset, with a proven track record of successful mission execution around the globe. Our FRCs demonstrate endurance and agility in their near-shore operations but have also displayed an inimitable ability to patrol the Indo-Pacific and engage with our partners, increasing presence and promoting governance throughout the region. The fiscal year 2025 request provides \$216 million to support the construction of 2 FRCs that will expand Coast Guard presence to support the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. FRCs are uniquely equipped to conduct the types of engagements that support our partners, deter our adversaries, and promote good maritime governance in this vital region.

Aviation Assets

Coast Guard aviation is integral to accomplishing our wide spectrum of missions. Aviation assets and support infrastructure are, and will continue to be, a major target of future investments. The fiscal year 2025 request includes \$206 million to recapitalize and sustain fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, including support for growth

of the MH-60T helicopter fleet through the acquisition of 4 aircraft that will continue our transition away from the MH-65E as that aircraft reaches its end of service life in the late 2030's.

Shore Infrastructure

Shore facility recapitalization is critical to mission success. As the Service deploys new, more capable assets, infrastructure projects like pier construction, maintenance and industrial support buildings, and facilities that support our workforce cannot be viewed as optional. The fiscal year 2025 request includes targeted investments to continue the build-out of Base Charleston, South Carolina; funds the construction of a FRC homeport in Astoria, Oregon; delivers new facilities for Sector Lower Mississippi in Memphis, Tennessee; and supports the build-out of Forward Operating Locations for FRCs in the Indo-Pacific. Given the Coast Guard's broad infrastructure needs, these investments are necessary to ensure the Service has the 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. Funding the Coast Guard at the levels below those requested in this budget could jeopardize the long-term readiness of the Service, putting American lives, national security, and the 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. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Admiral Fagan.

Our Members will be recognized by order of seniority for their 5 minutes of questioning. Given the time constraints that we have I would ask the Members to keep their questioning to 5 minutes only.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions. Admiral Fagan, the polar security cutter, the heavy ice breakers, can you give us an update on what is going on with that? We should have had our first cutter already in the water and we haven't even started building it yet. What is going on?

Admiral FAGAN. Polar security cutter is a critical national security asset for the Nation as we create the ability to operate and generate presence in our own exclusive economic zone, in our own waters. Polar security cutter contract has been delayed. We are working with the shipyard.

There was—the shipyard was sold and purchased by Bollinger. It is now Bollinger Mississippi. We are working with that shipbuilder to finalize the detailed design, begin building the cutter in earnest.

We began some module work. I owe the committee an update on what the time line will be for actual construction of the cutter. I—

Mr. GIMENEZ. Admiral, could I cut you? You say you are working on the final design? You are supposed to have a ship in the water and you are still working on a design?

Admiral FAGAN. We have a design. The design maturity is critical to reducing risk in on-ward schedule slippage and cost. So that work is—

Mr. GIMENEZ. How many years have you have been designing this icebreaker?

Admiral FAGAN. We have been working with the yard owners for the past several years. The original—

Mr. GIMENEZ. What is several years? How many years you have been—it is supposed to be in the water now. You are 5 years behind, right?

Admiral FAGAN. We are absolutely behind schedule.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Well, how many years you have been designing this cutter?

Admiral FAGAN. I will have my staff come back to when we actually started that design work. We are very close to having the design maturity needed to begin to build and create certainty around cost and schedule.

Mr. GIMENEZ. With all due respect, Commandant, I have been on this committee 3 years. We have been hearing the same thing, that we are really close to design and finishing the design. What is the problem? Why haven't you finished the design? You can't start building it until you have your design. What is the problem?

Admiral FAGAN. The original company that the bid was awarded to lost time and schedule. They did not have all of the engineers on that they needed to begin to move that forward. COVID complicated that time line. I am confident in the shipbuilder that we have. I am confident in where we are with regard to design maturity, and I am confident we will begin building that ship before the end of the year and look forward to providing more details to the committee.

Mr. GIMENEZ. So we can look forward to laying the keel before the end of December?

Admiral FAGAN. I don't have the exact keeling date. I will come back to you with that, sir.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Well, this is an issue of national security. To be honest with you, to not even have the design done yet when you are supposed to have the ship in the water by now, that doesn't give us much confidence. OK?

Admiral FAGAN. I understand.

Mr. GIMENEZ. So I will move on. On your recruitment, we are 2,500, you know, sailors short. Where are you on recruitment? You said you had made gains there. All right. What is the cause of the problem and what are you going to do to make sure that we have enough personnel to run the Coast Guard?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes, we appreciate the on-going support of the committee to help us meet our recruitment challenges and over the past several years that support has allowed us to bring on more recruiters, establish a talent acquisition profession. All of those investments are paying dividends.

This year, at this point, we have met our reservation numbers so we are for the first time in nearly 9 years on a trajectory to at least stop losing people at a greater rate than we are on-boarding them. The talent that is coming to the Service is exceptional. I meet the young people at Cape May. They are driven and know why they have joined the Coast Guard.

We continue to make investments going to young people where they are to ensure they are aware of the opportunities that the

Coast Guard presents and that they under—understand what our value proposition is.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Well, so you stopped the bleeding, right? Or you think you stopped the bleeding? By that I mean you were losing more people than you are getting into the Coast Guard. So you are stopping the bleeding but you bled out a lot. So how many more national personnel are you going to need? How many are you short right now?

Admiral FAGAN. We are short with approximately 2,300 right now. As I said, while we have stopped that we need to continue to keep our foot on the accelerator and we are doing that.

Some of the additional investments that the Service will benefit from is engagement and work around infrastructure at Cape May, which is our single source for training enlisted personnel to ensure that they have a first-class experience.

We continue to work with the oversight committees to ensure that we have—

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, ma'am. My time is up.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

Madam Commandant, one of the things that I think in the recruitment you could look at is if we did recruitment like we do the rest of our service academies, that Members of Congress can make appointments to the Coast Guard, that might be a way of closing that gap since the other service academies they are doing a pretty good job of fulfilling that.

For some of the new Members on the committee, as you know, the Coast Guard is the only service academy where we can't make nominations to. When you look at where most of the people in the Coast Guard come from, they come from either the East Coast or the West Coast. So if you are in Texas or Oklahoma or Mississippi, or all these other places, we don't have as many people. So I am just throwing that out as an option.

So the other thing I would like to talk a little bit about is the process that we included that the ship had to be built by an American-owned company. Am I correct?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes.

Mr. THOMPSON. So can you tell me how many shipbuilders that could be on that ship that is American-owned?

Admiral FAGAN. Polar security cutter is a complex ship to build. We have a number of shipyards, particularly along the Gulf Coast of the United States. As the contract was bid, any yard that won that bid was going to need to make significant capital investments in their structure and that yard, which is now Bollinger Mississippi, has made those capital investments and are in a position to build the ship.

Admiral FAGAN. So did that slow the process down, saying it had to be built by an American company?

Admiral FAGAN. Sir, I will have my staff come back to look at as we were making those, the bid and the contract, award decisions and give you clarity there. There is a limit to the national defense industrial base. We compete with the Navy for shipyard building capacity and ship repair.

The Nation needs all of the capacity we have and more to ensure a ready force and it applies to us as one of the branches of the Armed Services.

Mr. THOMPSON. So when was the last time the Coast Guard took receipt of an icebreaker?

Admiral FAGAN. The icebreakers that we are currently operating, the Coast Guard cutter *Polar Star* was commissioned in 1976 and the medium icebreaker Coast Guard cutter *Healy* was commissioned about 10 years after that. So it has been a number of years since we have commissioned a new icebreaker, heavy icebreaker, for operation in either the Antarctica or the Arctic.

Mr. THOMPSON. So do you have any knowledge of how often a request was made to Congress to fund an icebreaker?

Admiral FAGAN. I don't have the specifics of the funding ask and then the appropriation journey that we have been on, but happy to work with your staff and because that we have that—

Mr. THOMPSON. Yes. I think it is important that if the Coast Guard made the request that we need money to even build or expand the fleet and Congress didn't award the money, I mean, I think that would be significant for it.

So we both have talked about Operation Fouled Anchor. Are you comfortable with where that process is right now within the Coast Guard?

Admiral FAGAN. With regard to Operation Fouled Anchor, the legacy mishandling of sexual assaults at the Coast Guard Academy in the 1980's and 1990's, we continue to work with the Congressionally-directed IG investigation and will remain responsive. I respect the world of oversight.

As we wait for the investigation to complete, we have begun action as a service. I initiated a 90-day accountability and transparency review. There were 33 directed actions, 18 of them have been completed.

But more importantly, this is a journey that will continue. This is not a checklist that when it is done we are done. This is how we will create culture intolerant of any kind of harmful behavior as a service, and I am excited about the progress we have made and welcome an opportunity to share more details.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the Ranking Member.

I now recognize the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Ezell.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Admiral, for being here today. My home State of Mississippi is a hub for shipbuilding in the United States. For decades Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula has delivered vessels for the United States Coast Guard and the Navy. This includes 10 of the 11 planned national security cutters to the Coast Guard, and they are on track to deliver the final vessels in the next few years.

Additionally, Bollinger, also in my district, is contracted by the Coast Guard to build the polar security cutter, the first heavy icebreaker to be built in the United States in nearly 50 years.

Despite these accomplishments, shipyards in my State are struggling to find an adequate work force. While the shipyards are working on solutions, more needs to be done to ensure the long-term

success of these shipyards and the local economy in southeast Mississippi.

Companies like Bollinger continue to hire and train workers at a rate that previous owners of the facility hadn't seen in over a decade.

Admiral Fagan, how is the Coast Guard navigating these work force challenges and supporting the shipyards?

Admiral FAGAN. We have talked to just now about my own work force challenges and work force is a challenge for all employers. We continue to work with the yards on the Gulf Coast who we have contracts with, whether it is polar security cutter, fast response cutters, the offshore patrol cutter, and recognize that work force and steady, reliable, predictable work for those yards becomes a critical way for them to create certainty for their work force. And continue to look to create that certainty and predictability so that work force can be hired, trained, and employed. It is critical to our national security.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. I am also encouraged by the recent trilateral agreement between the United States, Canada, and Finland to place South Mississippi as the icebreaker capital of the world for our allies.

The Navy has funding to invest in shipyards that help make capital improvements. These investments enhance shipyard operations and support improving the work force, resulting in better products for the Federal Government, service members, and ultimately all Americans.

We know smaller shipyards often contract with the Coast Guard. Do you think that the Coast Guard would benefit from a similar investment fund?

Admiral FAGAN. Access to shipbuilding and ship repair capacity is critical to the Coast Guard's readiness and critical to our national security. Any opportunity to increase the resiliency of the national defense industrial base as it pertains to shipbuilding is overall a good strategy and would benefit not just the Coast Guard but the Nation.

Mr. EZELL. Very good, thank you. I would like to move to something else here just for a minute about the shrimping and fishing industry in my district, these hardworking mariners and fishermen that help feed the United States and contribute significantly to southeast Mississippi economy.

I continue to hear about the impact of illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing on these families. We must continue to fight the illegal dumping and enforce the UFLPA. We have seen these foreign countries, mainly the CCP, have no regard for our laws or our communities.

With the growing threat to the IUU around the world, especially with China's more aggressive fishing fleet, do you agree more investments should be made to increase the FRC acquisitions?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. Illegal fishing is a crime and it is a crime that is committed around the globe. The best counter for illegal fishing is creating on-scene and on-water presence, so any investments that create extra capacity to counter that crime of illegal fishing is a benefit.

The fast response cutters have been exceptional assets for us, not just in illegal fishing but in many of the other missions and operations we conduct as a Coast Guard.

Mr. EZELL. Very good. What legal authority does the Coast Guard have to bring these perpetrators of IUU fishing to justice?

Admiral FAGAN. We engage in countering illegal fishing literally around the world and in some cases we partner with ally and partner nations to allow them to exercise their own sovereignty and their own authorities in their own waters.

With regard to IUU fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, we continue to engage to counter that activity and create opportunities for enforcement and consequences to breaking the law.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to invite you down to Bollinger Marine you can see the progress that is being made down there. I would like to invite any Member on this committee to come see what we are doing down there for the Coast Guard.

So with that, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the gentleman from Mississippi. I may take you up on that.

The votes have been called and so the committee will stand in recess until after the end of this vote series.

[Recess.]

Mr. LUTTRELL [presiding]. Again, thank you, Admiral, for your graciousness on the development of the day.

Are you ready, Mr. Magaziner? Mr. Magaziner, you are recognized for 5 minutes, sir.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Congressman Luttrell and I have been waiting for this day for a long time so—

Mr. LUTTRELL. You get to witness it. Tell all your friends that this is the future of Homeland right here.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Yes. I am going to get us in trouble.

Well, thank you again.

Thank you, Admiral. Rhode Island, of course, has a long, rich history with the Coast Guard which maintains an active presence in our State conducting search-and-rescue missions, protecting our waters from environmental contamination and illegal fishing, among other important missions.

I am very proud that as of 2022, 2 additional Coast Guard cutters, the *Tahoma* and the *Campbell*, now call Newport home and we are very proud and grateful for that.

One issue that we are having in Rhode Island as relates to the Coast Guard has to do with the availability of housing. I have heard from constituents, from Coast Guard Service members who are having a hard time finding housing in the region, and particularly in the Newport area where they have to compete with, like, the vacation rental market and other factors. I know that this is not an isolated experience. Forty-one percent of U.S. Coast Guard units are located either in remote areas without a lot of housing stock or in the high vacation rental areas like in Newport.

So can you talk about how the Coast Guard is managing the housing program and what we as Members of Congress can do to help you in those efforts?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you. Housing is obviously a challenge for the work force as we transfer them every several years and the Newport is no exception to the challenge in finding housing. We work to exercise all of our authorities with regard to housing and so approach it from a diversified standpoint.

Where Congress can help is ensuring we have got adequate housing allowance reimbursement for the work force so they can actually access the housing. We are working to exercise long-term leases to provide better predictability for people and, obviously, rely on military bases and some of the public-private venture housing there.

I know all of those are leverages that we use both in Newport and across the country to support our personnel.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Thank you. We heard a little bit already about the staffing shortages, the personnel shortages that the Coast Guard is facing. One of the impacts of that has been the reduced service at the Castle Hill Station in Newport and so I am wondering if you could give us a sense of what the time line might be to returning to a full level of operation there and what needs to happen in order to get that done?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. Station Castle Hill was one of the stations that we moved to scheduled mission only. It reflects the shortfall in nonrated and junior personnel that we are managing as a Service.

That shortfall is currently about 2,300 people. I shared earlier that we have gained ground on our recruiting and recruiting challenges and we, at this point in the year, have the number of reservations that we need to sort-of stop the growth in losses.

It is going to take us time to build back. We will continue to keep our foot on the gas to ensure that we are recruiting any and all who want to serve this incredible organization and look forward to working with you in this committee to ensure that we have got all of the right investments for recruiting so we can continue to grow.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Thank you. Of course, I think part of how we address recruitment is by making sure that the Coast Guard is seen as a place that is welcoming to everyone. You referenced the issues with sexual assault at the academy in the 1980's and 1990's. Can you just talk a little bit about what protocols, what programs have been put in place to ensure that that culture remains in the past and is no longer present going forward?

Admiral FAGAN. We have made an incredible number of investments in the organization and today are not the same organization that we were in the 1980's and 1990's. Sexual assault is a crime. It is investigated as a crime. I am committed to ensuring that there is full accountability when a crime occurs.

What we are doing around Service culture today that we have moved out on aggressively is to ensure that the culture is intolerant of any harm, whether it is the crime of sexual assault, hazing, bullying, retaliation.

We have stepped into that work. I am proud of the progress we are making and would welcome an opportunity to share with you in detail some of the investments we have made and additional investments we will need to ensure that we complete this journey.

Mr. MAGAZINER. All right. Thank you, Admiral.

I yield back.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Thank you, sir.

Admiral, can you give me kind-of a—and we don't have to get too, too far into the weeds on this, but your cyber infrastructure, your cyber effort and how you are sharing that across the force, and what that looks like globally and how the footprint and the expansiveness of the footprint when it comes to the cyber space?

Admiral FAGAN. We have been making investments in cyber, in our cyber work force, both to—it started with protecting our own cyber infrastructure and increasingly includes investments and expertise as it relates to the marine transportation system and ensuring that the system we rely on in our Nation for \$5.4 trillion in economic benefit is hardened and safe in the cyber world.

There was an Executive Order in February that clarified our role in response to a cyber incident, and we are in the process of writing a rule making to clarify standards for the industry that we regulate to ensure that they as well are cyber-hardened. We sit in a great area of expertise between understanding the maritime sector and having cyber expertise.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Well, you are definitely the subject-matter expert. I would think creating cross-functional teams is a must engaging with other services in their cyber force.

Is there information sharing going because this is the tricky part and this is something that is kind-of frustrating to the committee, that when we talk about cyber infrastructure is it is very siloed.

You know, I am a Navy guy, so, obviously, Army hates me for some reason, you know, but we don't—information sharing seems to be kind-of restricted and we are trying to thread the seams. Have you engaged with your counterparts in this, in cyber?

Admiral FAGAN. We absolutely engage with our DOD counterparts. I have Coast Guard personnel at U.S. Cyber Command. I have a Coast Guard Cyber Command. We lean on that training and infrastructure.

Our CPTs and mission teams work right alongside our DOD counterparts. We are a member of the intelligence community and working to share information and break down those silos is an important part of the work that is on-going.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Looking forward, and I mean, I would ask leadership to look, you need to be looking 10 to 20 years ahead of where we are today. Is there advancements that you are—let's see, I think the best way to say this is, is there a stall point that you are seeing in the Coast Guard when it comes to cyber buildout, to ask the one? Because the committee itself understands the importance in the development of cybersecurity and what that does for our operational and strategic and tactical advantages. Is there something that is kind-of pinging hard on your radar?

Admiral FAGAN. We have been making these investments in cyber and cyber expertise. We have stood up a cyber rating, a cyber specialty within the organization.

Mr. LUTTRELL. OK. How does that—OK. Since—well, yes. I am glad you said that because I know recruiting across the board, minus the Marine Corps, you know, if there are any Marines in here good job, recruiting seems to be difficult when it comes to our cyber specialists.

When we talk about enhancing our recruiting capabilities that seems to be one of those niches that we can't fill. Are you finding any success from last year to this year?

Admiral FAGAN. Cyber is definitely an area that people, young people, are interested in. They want to join and serve in. So it has been a benefit to have cyber specialty, cyber rating.

I would welcome an opportunity to work with the committee as we look at how do we continue to not just recruit but then retain that work force as we provide incredible expertise and training that we then need to retain either as a Coast Guard or, frankly, in the military to ensure our national security.

There is still room to grow there and would welcome further—

Mr. LUTTRELL. Right. I do think that is a narrative we need to adjust. Actually, we need to recreate the narrative to recruitment in the military and how it is one of the most successful pathways you can possibly have as a young, aspiring American.

As far as our waterway footprint and the amount of immigration we see coming across the waters, and forgive me for lack of a better term, but Coast Guard is responsible for the policing of the global waterways. Is that overwhelming the system?

Admiral FAGAN. Is the question specifically related to maritime—

Mr. LUTTRELL. Is the draw to when we have the Cuban immigrants coming across the waterways; the Haitians, they are coming across. It seems like we have to migrate a lot of effort into that particular spot. Are we losing effort elsewhere because we are having to focus in on that?

Admiral FAGAN. The Coast Guard views our maritime migration work, it is life-saving work as people make desperate attempts to illegally migrate to the country. We 2 years ago were seeing large numbers of migrant flows across all of the maritime vectors, moved assets, created increased presence.

More recently, this year, those flows have been down significantly, which frees assets. We still have them up postured in those vectors. We use unmanned systems as well as actual Coast Guard ships to create that presence, but we remain ever-vigilant to preventing mass migration at sea but balance that with the other demands on our work to include counternarcotics.

Mr. LUTTRELL. OK. Thank you, ma'am.

Mr. Brecheen, you are recognized for 5 minutes, sir.

Mr. BRECHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Admiral, thank you so much for being here. I really want to ducktail on my colleague from Texas when he was asking about the amount of personnel and equipment and supplies, attention to the Caribbean area.

I took a CODEL with a group. We had an incident with an Oklahoman and several people from the United States in one of the Caribbean islands recently, and it was astounding to find out as far out into the Caribbean area as Turks and Caicos that there was a patrol element and that we were spending so many resources in that area.

What is the footprint, you know, just, I guess, Turks and Caicos and the Puerto Rico area? What does that footprint look like in that Turks and Caicos region? The reason why I am asking this

question, I am concerned that maybe we are providing services, and I can tell you from meeting with the leaders of that country, that I think probably is taken for granted.

I can absolutely tell you that by meeting with their leadership, the Governor, the AG. I don't think that they understand in terms of just how they benefit from the American taxpayer.

Are we spending too much time and resources there where some of those assignments could be moved closer to the Florida area?

Admiral FAGAN. We have Coast Guard assets deployed into the maritime vectors where we historically see maritime migration to ensure that we prevent those illegal migrant attempts into the United States. You asked specifically about Puerto Rico. We have Coast Guard assets based in Puerto Rico, both fast response cutters and people at stations, as well as an air station to create that presence that is critical to deterring those illegal effects.

Much of the work we do it is not just the Coast Guard. It is interagency work and we do work with allies and partner nations as we look to mitigate and prevent illegal migration attempts.

Mr. BRECHEEN. But in regards to the amount of assignment that is that far away from the mainland, but my question is are we being as efficient as we could be? If I had a reason to play defense, there is a reason why you have post in the game of basketball because you kind-of concentrate manpower closer to where the goal is. You know, for the goal for illegal immigration is get access to mainland.

My question is are we sending so much personnel, equipment, time spent so far, thousands of miles off the mainland coast, that we are—your recruitment numbers are down, that maybe would be better spent focusing closer to our mainland?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. I am happy to have staff come over and walk through the complexity of how we place, you know, how we create that deterrent effect and going, you know, providing a defense further from the shore than being in your own end zone is an effective strategy. We have a multiple layered approach to doing that.

The Coast Guard men and women that do this work they understand the work. They enjoy the work. They take meaning and value from the work. Again, it is critical to our national security as we work to create homeland security.

Mr. BRECHEEN. Now, I want to switch topics. With regards to the cutter and in terms of the contract, you have every expectation that what will happen is with the design still being tweaked this late and you have already awarded a contract, they turned in the, you know, they turned in a bid. It was awarded by the Government.

They have already been establishing an increase in their spend to be able to have the capacity. I don't know what that would look like, if it is cranes, if it is footprint, if it is size, to be able to do something which, you know, is a very limited scope specialty.

But if your design is not complete they are going to issue a massive change order and then what wiggle room in negotiation does the Federal Government have, to make sure that that awarded contract—that they just don't name the price and we have the ability to say wait a minute? That is way outside of bounds.

I don't understand why the design where you have 2 in operation right now and we are just wanting to add another one that is updated, why is it taking so long to get the design that we know is going to be eaten financially up by change orders?

Admiral FAGAN. We have not built a polar security cutter or a heavy icebreaker as a Nation for nearly 50 years. It will be a big, complex ship. I am confident in the design and that when we field that ship it will meet the needs of the Nation.

We have been working with the shipbuilder to get to the level of design you need when you begin to cut steel that the ship is going to be, you know, delivered with a predictable schedule and predictable budget. I owe the committee an update on schedule and budget.

We have been building modules that the shipyard has been learning from with regard to the complexity of welding and assembly. Those modules will eventually come forward into the ship that we are building.

I am confident in the builder that we have the contract in.

Mr. BRECHEEN. I yield.

Mr. LUTRELL. Thank you, sir.

Mr. CRANE, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Admiral Fagan, thank you so much for coming today. I want to start by asking you to tell me about recruitment deficits that you have seen.

Admiral FAGAN. We began to have a deficit in recruiting several years ago and it was exasperated by COVID. We have seen the rebound from the COVID effect.

I appreciate the support of the committee and our overseers who have allowed us to make investments back into recruiters. We have professionalized our talent acquisition specialists. All of that has paid dividends.

We have, as of 2 weeks ago, the number of reservations, so that means people who are planning to go through Cape May that we need to consider a full, successful year and meet our recruiting.

The work force we are recruiting is second to none. They know why they are joining and they understand the value proposition to the American public.

Mr. CRANE. Why do you think you guys are failing to hit your numbers right now?

Admiral FAGAN. It was a combination of capacity and we have reinvested in that capacity. We are not always understood by the totality of the American people. So, you know, beginning to increase awareness and understanding of who we are as a Coast Guard.

Just as the shipyards are looking for work force, you know, we are competing with employers and other militaries of, you know, across the country for work force and, you know, young people have had some feelings with regard to work and all of that has come together to make it a challenge.

Mr. CRANE. Yes. Thank you, Admiral. What additional workload has been put on the Coast Guard and our sailors because we have a Commander-in-Chief who signaled to the rest of the entire world that we were about to throw our Southern Border wide open?

I know that you have to be careful in how you answer that. I will make that claim because I know I am able to watch cause and effect and I am not in your position. I don't wear your uniform and that is not my chain of command.

But with the policy changes of this Federal Government over the last couple years, what additional workload has that put on your work force, Admiral?

Admiral FAGAN. We view our role in preventing and interdicting migrants at sea as critical life-saving work, and we continue to ensure that we have got presence that is needed to prevent—

Mr. CRANE. Real quick, that is not what I asked you. I know that that is a part of what you guys have to do and it does absorb resources. I am asking you to give us an understanding of how much of an additional workload that has put on your resources, your infrastructure, your personnel because of the policy? Can you even give me a percentage?

Admiral FAGAN. Certainly happy to come over and we can walk you through all of the flows of migrants over the last several years. This year and today—

Mr. CRANE. Has there been any study to calculate the additional man-hours that is—

Admiral FAGAN. I can share with you the ebb and flow of man-hours and resources that we have put into the migrant—

Mr. CRANE. But you don't know if off of the top of your head, Admiral?

Admiral FAGAN. No, I don't.

Mr. CRANE. OK.

Admiral FAGAN. I don't because those resources also do other missions as we have them at sea. But happy to work with your staff and give you more specifics.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Admiral. Admiral Fagan, how do you assess the current state of readiness and preparedness of the U.S. Coast Guard to operate and respond effectively in the Arctic region, especially coordinating with your naval counterparts?

Admiral FAGAN. We operate the Nation's surface assets in the Arctic and the Coast Guard cutter *Healy*, in fact, is operating in the high latitudes today conducting science operations, creating presence for us as a Nation.

We work and interoperate up there with other military services, other Arctic nations' military services, and we create that on-scene presence in our own exclusive economic zone in the Arctic.

Mr. CRANE. Admiral Fagan, what DEI program implementations have been made in the Coast Guard within the last couple of years?

Admiral FAGAN. We are hiring talent as a service, the best talent that—

Mr. CRANE. I don't need the bullet point, ma'am. We all know that every institution within this Federal Government has now been plagued by this cancer of DEI instead of hiring people based on their merit alone. I am asking you what programs have been implemented within the last couple of years that focus solely on diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Admiral FAGAN. I will have the staff give you—we value diversity, but the talent that we—

Mr. CRANE. Ma'am, we have always valued diversity in this country, but we all know that we used to have a system that was more based on merit. I am asking you specific questions about what specific programs have been implemented under your watch within the last couple of years that focus on DEI?

Admiral FAGAN. I will have the staff work with your staff. I can't immediately say this program initiated in the last 2 years. Again, the programs all focus on ensuring work force that meets the standards, is able to serve honorably in the Service, and that we hire a work force that meets our standards.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Admiral.

Mr. GIMENEZ [presiding]. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. CRANE. I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Strong.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Chairman Gimenez.

Thank you for coming before the committee today, Admiral. I recognize and appreciate the growing deployment of the Coast Guard cutters to meet the threats around the world and note our Coast Guard is spending additional time deployed away from the United States.

This is especially true as the Coast Guard plays a key role in responding to China's actions in the South Sea throughout the Indo-Pacific. I do have some concerns, however, about the impact these deployments could have on our fleet.

Admiral, what impact has the increased deployment tempo in the Indo-Pacific had on the cutter fleet?

Admiral FAGAN. We are globally deployed as a Coast Guard and we conduct Coast Guard operations consistent with our authority. The work that we are doing in the Indo-Pacific is critical to countering China and to increasing other partners' capacity to enforce their own sovereignty and improve their own capacity and capability.

The Pacific support tender *Harriet Lane* is a perfect example of how a Coast Guard ship with Coast Guard authorities can create capacity and opportunity for a partner nation.

Mr. STRONG. What is the concept for conducting maintenance on forward-operating cutters moving forward?

Admiral FAGAN. So we continue to look at how we support cutters forward. When the large cutters are over in theater they are under the operational control of our DOD counterparts and we rely on them for logistic supports.

The fast response cutters have been fielded into the region. We have got several in Guam and we continue to look at innovative ways to ensure we have got the right maintenance and support for cutters as they are forward-deployed.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. What resources are currently available in the Indo-Pacific to the Coast Guard to conduct high-level scheduled and emergency maintenance to the fleet?

Admiral FAGAN. So, as I said, we rely heavily on the DOD services and investments that are over there, primarily the large cutters. We run them through their standard maintenance cycles focused on shipyard availability and continue to work to ensure that

we are appropriately supporting the fast response cutters as they conduct operations in the theater. A lot of that is in conversation with my DOD counterparts.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentleman yields.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Menendez.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Chair, Mr. Ranking Member, thank you for convening today's hearing.

I thank you for coming here today.

The U.S. maritime ports were largely unaffected by last week's CrowdStrike outage. That event showed the swift and severe consequences of IT disruptions. Given the reliance of global supply on the efficient transportation of cargo through maritime ports, IT disruptions at ports, such as the Port of New York and New Jersey, would have a significant impact on the U.S. and world economy.

It is imperative that we advance policies that will make our ports more resilient. In February 2024, the Coast Guard issued a notice proposing an update to its maritime security regulation by adding regulations specifically focused on establishing minimum cybersecurity requirements for U.S.-flagged vessels and ports.

Admiral, please explain why the Coast Guard believes such a rule change is necessary?

Admiral FAGAN. Cyber and cybersecurity is as critical to our infrastructure, resiliency, and readiness as hardware and infrastructure. We have invested our own cyber force expertise and now the intent of the rule making is to ensure that we have got the right clarity around standards for vessels and facilities.

We issued a notice of proposed rule making, opened a comment period. That comment period is now closed. We have had over 400 comments. We are listening to what was said and are working to work that rule forward so that it creates increased resiliency around cyber in our critical maritime port infrastructure.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Can you summarize sort-of what, generally, what the feedback has been from those roughly 400 or so comments?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. I have not seen the comments but they focus on, you know, just ensuring that it sets the right standard and fair playing field for mitigating risk in cyber across realm. I am happy to work with the staff on, you know, details, but, obviously, 400 comments is going to take us some time to work through them.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Yes. I am sure this is also harmonizing, right, because there are so many different operators from so many different regions under so many different regulatory regimes and ensuring that they understand sort-of what this rule would mean for them as they operate in sort-of multiple jurisdictions.

I would love to work with you. I was actually just in a cybersecurity meeting with our Cybersecurity Subcommittee chair, Andrew Garbarino. This is something that we would love to partner with you, given our port infrastructure in the district and our work on the Cybersecurity Subcommittee.

I want to turn to work force. You mentioned that modernizing the talent management system, which has remained unchanged for

75 years, is a top priority. Like many of my colleagues, I am concerned that the work force shortage will prevent the Coast Guard from effectively responding to a major event like a natural disaster.

Before I get to my question, I do want to mention that you have a terrific First District military aide, Melanie Arroyo, who is a proud product of Bayonne, New Jersey. She is an all-star and I am proud that she is a member of the Coast Guard. So I just wanted to give her a shout-out. The mayor of Bayonne is extremely proud of her. We all are.

But if the Coast Guard is required to respond to a large-scale emergency today would it have the staffing and resources it needs to do so while maintaining its various mission capabilities? Or would it have to scale back missions or make other changes?

Admiral FAGAN. So our role in crisis leadership and disaster response is one of the core strengths of the Coast Guard, and we remain always ready to respond in time of need, whether it is a hurricane, or look no further than the response to the Francis Scott Key Bridge, which showcases the flexibility and nimbleness that we bring as a maritime organization, a military, a law enforcement agency.

We continue to view that as critical work that we provide to the American public and ensure that we stay nimble and responsive should that need arise again. Or I should say when that need arises again.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Of course. I appreciate that. On May 14, 2024, the House passed my bill, H.R. 7702, as part of the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2024. This legislation was introduced in response to the tragic vessel fire in Newark last July, which claimed the lives of 2 brave firefighters, Augusto "Auggie" Acabou and Wayne "Bear" Brooks, Jr., both Newark firefighters.

To address the significant risk posed by vessel fires, what are the Coast Guard's current capabilities for coordinating with local firefighting units and other stakeholders to ensure effective response prevention measure for vessel fires?

Admiral FAGAN. So our role in the ports and communities is to bring all of the entities together, response entities and port facilities, to ensure that lines of authority and capabilities are well-understood. That is done in New York through the Area Maritime Security Committee.

You know, we continue to serve in a coordinating and a convening role to ensure that all entities with capacity and authority are able to talk to each other and understand before the response happens.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I appreciate that, and I appreciate your work on all fronts. Thank you again for being here today.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the gentleman from New Jersey.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Georgia, Ms. Greene.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Since the start of the 118th Congress, our committee has been laser-focused on securing our border and stopping the flow of illegal migration and illegal narcotics. The Coast Guard plays a significant role in DHS's posture on the maritime border.

Most of us have seen videos on social media of Coast Guard boarding teams seizing drug boats and stopping boats overladen with migrants attempting to illegally enter the United States. We are thankful to the Coast Guard and the hard work that they do on behalf of the United States.

Admiral Fagan, on average, how many illegal aliens does the Coast Guard interdict in a year?

Admiral FAGAN. The number of interdictions that we encounter at sea has varied significantly year to year. This year to date the numbers have been quite low in comparison to previous years. Happy to have the staff come over and walk you through 3 to 5 years' worth of maritime migration interdiction numbers.

Creating on-water presence helps prevent that flow, and also policy clarity with regard to consequences for illegal attempts to migrate also have a significant impact on whether the numbers are up or down. Weather gets a vote, too.

Ms. GREENE. Right, certainly understood. Thank you. We would probably take you up on that offer. I would appreciate it.

What countries are the most frequent countries where people are illegally trying to enter the United States?

Admiral FAGAN. I will speak to the maritime migration flows. The typical nationalities encountered at sea are Haiti and Cuba. There are some onesies, twosies, and again, can walk through all that, but primarily at sea it is Haiti and Haitians and Cubans.

Ms. GREENE. On average, how many drug boats does the Coast Guard intercept every year? I know you may not have the number in front of you.

Admiral FAGAN. Our counternarcotics mission work in the Eastern Pacific and in the Caribbean is critical. It, too, is life-saving work preventing narcotics from reaching the streets of the United States and resulting in overdoses.

This is a line of effort that we work in conjunction with other allies and our DOD partners, and we continue to interdict primarily cocaine but some marijuana as well at sea. That is work that Coast Guard members are doing right now as we sit in this hearing room. Again, can walk you through those annual reports and numbers, but it is critical life-saving and national security work we do on behalf of the Nation.

Ms. GREENE. Well, we thank the Coast Guard for that. On average, how many pounds of narcotics does the Coast Guard seize every year? That is pretty much what you just alluded to, cocaine and mostly cocaine you said? Some marijuana?

Admiral FAGAN. The majority that we see at sea in the maritime flow is cocaine, but we are also seeing marijuana and occasionally we will find some fentanyl or methanol. Again, happy to walk you through all that. It varies year to year, month to month.

Ms. GREENE. Of the total migrant and drug boats that sail from Central and South America or Cuba or Haiti, what percentage does the Coast Guard interdict with and what percentage evades detection?

Admiral FAGAN. So when we detect a migrant venture, you know, we work then to follow it and interdict at sea. The ability to detect, particularly vessels that are not on the high seas, can be a challenge.

When we detect the vessel we move to interdict. I don't have off-hand what the estimate on the number of interdictions versus number of getaways but it is life-saving work to ensure people don't lose their lives as they make these incredibly hazardous journeys to at sea.

Ms. GREENE. How many migrants do lose their lives? I would imagine there are some that don't make it.

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. Our goal is to prevent that loss of life but there have been loss of life in the maritime flows. Would be happy to share what the estimates are. That as well varies year to year.

Ms. GREENE. Dangerous job for the Coast Guard as well. Has there been loss of life for members of the Coast Guard?

Admiral FAGAN. We have been very fortunate that our members have not been killed, but it is dangerous work. We continue to ensure we have got the right training and policy and procedures to mitigate that risk, but it is work that we happily do on behalf of the Nation and will continue to lean into.

I am committed to ensuring my work force has all the tools and training they need to do it safely.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Admiral Fagan.

I yield back.

Mr. CRANE [presiding.] Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Carter.

Mr. CARTER. Well, thank you for your service. We know your job is not an easy one, and we have the utmost respect for anyone who wears the uniform and protects our flank. So God bless you, ma'am.

As the climate changes, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are increasing. This summer a prolonged and intense heat wave has impacted millions across our country. Hurricane Beryl, which recently hit the Caribbean and Texas, was the earliest-ever category 5 Atlantic hurricane.

This was fueled by the ocean being as warm in June as it is typically would be in September after months of summer fun or summer sun, rather. We still have many weeks left of summer and months left of hurricane season. How has extreme weather fueled by climate change impacted the Coast Guard's operation?

Admiral FAGAN. We are, obviously, deployed or employed along the coast line and so as weather events and flooding events intensify it impacts our infrastructure. As we have rebuilt the post-hurricanes in previous years we moved to rebuild that infrastructure so it is resilient to those kinds of impacts from climate change.

Our role as a first responder, disaster responder, leader in disaster, we continue to hone those skills and, you know, I am certain, whether it was the Francis Scott Key Bridge or Beryl or the next disaster, that the Coast Guard people will be there and ready to lead and support the Nation.

Mr. CARTER. Can you speak to the precautions the Coast Guard has taken to protect its people and its physical assets in light of the increasingly hot summer and intense storms anticipated?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. We continue as opportunity presents itself to make investments in our infrastructure to make them more ready and more resilient to the impacts of both temperature and

water events and will continue to look for those opportunities to make those investments in the future.

Mr. CARTER. How does the Coast Guard support Hurricane Beryl response efforts and how well-prepared, in your estimations, is the Coast Guard to respond to future events?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. The Coast Guard takes our role in responding to hurricanes quite seriously. We do a lot of work as the hurricane is approaching a coastal area to ensure that our ports and our harbors are resilient, that our own equipment and people are out of harm's way.

We posture and we assure that as the storm passes and we are able to begin moving primarily, you know, aviation assets and boats that we are in a position to do critical life-saving work and then move to bring the alignment of Federal, State, and local responders together to ensure that those communities' needs are being met and met in a way that is responsive to whatever the impacts of the storm was.

Mr. CARTER. Has it been effective, ma'am, working with local and State GOHSEPs and the like to make sure that the deployment of resources are timely dispatched and the assistance is met with the coordination that is required?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. In our ports and communities our captain of the ports, who are, you know, O6 captain level in each of the major ports in the country, they convene the other Federal, State, and local responders.

This happens in the good times so that when an actual disaster or response has occurred those people in the port they know each other. They understand authorities and capabilities and are able to come together much more quickly for alignment on response.

The Francis Scott Key Bridge is a perfect example of how all that comes together for great benefit for both the local community and the Nation.

Mr. CARTER. As I often say, we know when these storms are coming, we know their names. They tend to come faster, stay longer, and come with greater intensity. God forbid that we don't learn from each storm to make sure that we are not doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

Including the local communities is paramount in making sure in the pre-, during, and post-effects that the people are well-informed of access and opportunities to stay safe.

Real quickly, through U.S. maritime ports, though the U.S. maritime ports were largely unaffected by last week's CrowdStrike outage, the event showed the swift and severe consequences of IT disruptions.

Given the resilience of the global supply on the efficient transportation of cargo, how are we addressing those concerns?

Admiral FAGAN. We take our role in cyber as it pertains to the marine transportation system seriously. We have been investing in our own cyber expertise in cyber capacity.

We are in the process of a notice of proposed rule making to clarify standards with regard to cyber, cyber readiness, cyber resiliency as it pertains to ships and facilities and continue to work on ensuring we have got the most resilient marine transportation system that the Nation needs.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, ma'am. My time has expired.

As I opened I will close the same way. Ma'am, thank you for your service and all the men and women of the Coast Guard for the incredible work that you do.

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. CRANE. The Chairman now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Gonzales.

Mr. GONZALES. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, Commandant, for being here. I want to follow up to my colleague from Arizona his questions on DEI because I am also concerned with that.

I think back to my time in the military where we had mandatory training and some of that mandatory training I thought was appropriate as a master chief. Sometimes I thought it was busy work. Parts of it was busy work. Then some of it I thought took us away from doing our job.

So the question for you is how many hours of mandatory DEI training do Coast Guardsmen have?

Admiral FAGAN. We have a number of mandated general military training requirements. I don't know of a stand-alone course. We would have to look into each of those to understand is there a DEI component.

My focus on the Service is hiring talent that meets the standards and then ensuring when a member has taken their oath and decided to serve that they encounter an environment that is free from harm and that is intolerant of harm and where everyone is valued and able to achieve their fullest potential.

Mr. GONZALES. I would appreciate it if we can get back with maybe a number of hours on that as you dig through it. Once again, I am concerned that we take away from our job and your job is very important. It is very critical.

I would also say DEI does not equal diversity in many cases, but I will leave it there. I would love to follow up with you on that part.

Now, to talk a little bit of tactical, JIATF South. I am a proponent of JIATF South. I think it is the gold standard in many cases of bringing interagencies together and success. Outside of being on Homeland Security, I am also on the Homeland Security Committee—I am also on Appropriations.

So my question is very clear to you. JIATF South plays a critical component to counternarcotics and maritime security. What additional resources, money, right, how much money do you need in order to have Coast Guard successes increase specifically when talking about JIATF South?

Admiral FAGAN. I agree JIATF South is absolutely the gold standard in not just interagency alignment but also international partner alignment as they do all of the detection and monitoring for the counternarcotics effort.

Specific to the U.S. Coast Guard needs, it comes back to our major ship acquisition programs, ensuring that we have got reliable budget authority and appropriation for our acquisitions, particularly the offshore patrol cutter which the first one was launched in the fall.

But creating ship capacity that creates the force package that gives you end game in JIATF is really where the sweet spot is for the Coast Guard.

Mr. GONZALES. Excellent, and I look forward to continuing to work together. I think one of the issues has always been the lack of platforms that JIATF South has in order to operate. The mission always grew. There was always plenty of work. There was just not enough assets to go above because you were oftentimes competing with other areas.

Once again, as I put my appropriator hat on, if there is any way I can help in that, would love to work with your team, maybe more specifics outside of the overall umbrella, but more specifics in order to build that out. I am very interested in that.

My next question is on CrowdStrike. The CrowdStrike IT outage impacted the world. On that day, the U.S. Coast Guard Southeast posted via X, "The nationwide connectivity outage are impacting the U.S. Coast Guard Rescue 21 systems and #D7. For urgent distress, please use VHF radio 16 to reach out to the Coast Guard or dial the Seventh District command center." Was this an isolated incident or was this Coast Guard-wide?

Admiral FAGAN. So the CrowdStrike incident that we all tracked as a Nation early on that day and Friday was not the cause of the Rescue 21 outage. Instead, it was a hardware failure on a Verizon system that we rely on for some of our network.

We continue to work to troubleshoot that. Understand it was a Coast Guard-wide impact to the Rescue 21. Speaks to the need to ensure our own resiliency in our own IT infrastructure and welcome further discussion to see where we might be able to make more investments.

Mr. GONZALES. To that point, I would like to continue to work together on future situations where we can make this—you know, we can prevent this from happening.

My last question is on an article from DefenseScoop of last year that highlighted "Coast Guard petitions for formal recognition to the U.S. Cyber Command Force." Given the Coast Guard's unique cyber positions and its dual role under the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense, how will this formal recognition within U.S. Cyber Mission Force enhance Coast Guard's cyber capabilities?

Admiral FAGAN. We have been investing in our cyber capabilities both internal to the organization and the work we do in support of USCYBERCOM and with USCYBERCOM. Happy to have staff come over. There are a number of Classified elements to it but walk you through all that is going on and how we contribute to the broader cyber fight in defense of the Nation.

Mr. GONZALES. We covered a lot of ground in 5 minutes but, once again, these cyber issues aren't going away. The Coast Guard is the tip of the spear in many cases and I want to make sure that you have a partner not only in me, but also in this committee.

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you.

Mr. GONZALES. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Thanedar.

Mr. THANEDAR. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Admiral Fagan, for being here and I thank the men and women of Coast Guard for their hard work.

Operation Fouled Anchor revealed a culture at the Coast Guard Academy that allowed abuse to persist and go unchecked. Senior cadets were given power over junior cadets that they misused and cadets were rarely held to account. Allegations were downgraded and dismissed.

The academy insulated itself from the rest of the Service by handling allegations internally and sealed records. According to the final report of investigation, victims did not receive respect consistent with Coast Guard's core values on several levels. These are facts, Admiral Fagan.

I would like to better understand the standards of character for cadets at the Coast Guard Academy as they are now. If a cadet was found severely liable for sexually abusing and defaming a woman, would that violate the Coast Guard's code of conduct?

Admiral FAGAN. The Fouled Anchor investigation revealed to us inadequate handling and investigation of sexual assaults reported by cadets in the 1980's and 1990's at the Coast Guard Academy. One assault is one assault too many, and we are not the same organization today that we were then when we failed to create the appropriate environment for reports of sexual assault.

The standard at the Coast Guard Academy is the same standard that we have in the Service and that is that we will not tolerate sexual assault, harassment, retaliation, retribution, hazing, bullying. Growing a culture that is fully intolerant of that change where people have the courage to act, to report, and that there is trust in the system is the work that we are doing.

Mr. THANEDAR. Well, let me ask you, if 18 women accused a cadet of having a history of disgusting and at times criminal behavior toward women, including sexual harassment and sexual assault, would that cadet be allowed to serve?

Admiral FAGAN. Those reports today result in a full investigation. When substantiated and misconduct is found those cadets are not allowed to graduate.

Mr. THANEDAR. All right. If a cadet had a history of making public vulgar and profanity-laced remarks about women, so vulgar that I cannot read them here today, would that cadet be considered fit for service?

Admiral FAGAN. We would fully investigate. With that report we would fully investigate it and determine whether the behavior—and it does not sound like it is consistent with our core values, and hold that cadet accountable, the same as we would with any member of the Service who is found to have conducted themselves inconsistently with our core values.

Mr. THANEDAR. Would that cadet be considered fit for service?

Admiral FAGAN. No, but again, consistent with policy, program, and our core values. I won't tolerate misconduct. I don't tolerate criminal behavior when it is reported and it comes to light and we investigate it. We will move to ensure accountability and that means in some cases removal from service, other cases reduction in grade.

We have a number of tools and we will fully leverage those tools when somebody is found to have, No. 1, crimes and the criminal system has been well-invested in, but other misconduct as well must be addressed.

Mr. THANEDAR. Thank you, Admiral Fagan. Obviously, these behaviors are unacceptable for all Coast Guard service members from candidates to senior leaders and, in fact, for any leaders in this country. Do you agree?

Admiral FAGAN. I hold myself and the work force to the highest standards of ethics and integrity. Our core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty guide us in all that we do, both on and off duty. We must hold ourselves to the highest standards.

Mr. THANEDAR. Thank you, Admiral.

I yield back.

Mr. CRANE. I want to thank the witness for her valuable testimony and the Members for their questions. The Members of the committee may have some additional questions for you, Admiral, and we would ask that you respond to these in writing.

Pursuant to committee rule VII(D), the hearing record will be open for 10 days.

OK. Ranking Member Thompson would like to make a closing statement.

Mr. THOMPSON. Well, one of things I didn't get a chance to say, Admiral, is let me thank the gold standard of the Coast Guard for being johnny-on-the-spot as first responders.

I went through Katrina and a lot of other stuff and I know Congressman Carter and others who—Congressman Ezell, who represents the Gulf of Mexico area, really appreciate it. I have seen the work.

The men and women do a stellar job as first responders. I mean, it is sort-of like when they show up you know the real help is there. So I want to just compliment you for doing that.

Your mission is critical. Everybody here, it talks about putting resources where they need to be. I would encourage you to go back and ask for more, whether it is in a supplemental that we expect in the not-too-distant future or something, and let's see if we can't get you where you need to be from a resource standpoint so it is good.

But also I need your commitment that once the inspector general finishes his work that you will take whatever action necessary to do it. It is a black eye on the Coast Guard that women who serve are being harassed and others and we just can't have it.

So it has been documented and I encourage you to once the work is complete that your commitment is that we will get it done, and I know you will do that.

But also, Mr. Chairman, last summer this committee passed Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee's cyber work force bill, but it has not yet been considered on the floor. In the Congresswoman's honor, I urged the Chairman to ensure that her bill is considered and passed this Congress. I think it would be a fitting tribute to her legacy on this committee.

I look forward to working with you to get it done. We didn't have any opposition to it, so it should go forward without any delay. I look forward to working with whoever to make that happen.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. CRANE. Without objection, this committee stands adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 12:27 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

