

# Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's State of the Coast Guard Address

February 23, 2012

## *Navigating Uncertain and Stormy Seas*

Good morning Shipmates . . .

I would like to welcome all of you viewing via webcast, including our future leaders and heroes in New London and Cape May.

I did something new this year - I asked all Commanding Officers and Officers in Charge to ensure our entire Service views this address. Throughout our history, when Service leaders had an important message to communicate, it would be sent out with an order to read to all-hands at muster.

Today, we are attempting to revive this tradition by using technology. I would like to start off by thanking our Pacific Area Commander, Vice Admiral Manson Brown for being such a gracious host, as well as Base Alameda's Commanding Officer Captain Gary Spenik.

To my knowledge, this is the first time we have held the State of the Coast Guard address outside of Washington, D.C., and I could not be more pleased that we're holding it in a great Coast Guard City like Alameda!

So, you might be wondering, why - Why did we decide to change the venue for this year's address? The answer is simple. I wanted to come to the field, where we conduct operations, to talk directly to you about our Coast Guard.

And while I am speaking to you from Alameda today, I want you to know that I am tremendously proud of all of you, wherever you are serving - you are performing challenging maritime missions that are vital to American security and prosperity.

But, there is another reason why I chose to address you from Alameda.

Because, from our vantage point, here at the edge of the Pacific Rim - we can see the future.

To the North of our compass lies the Bering Sea - one of the richest fishing grounds in the world - and farther north, the maritime frontier of the Arctic. In the summer, an

entire new ocean is emerging. The promise of shorter shipping routes, petroleum discoveries and tourism are propelling an increase in human activity.

To the South, along the Americas, lies the Eastern Pacific transit zone - an area that smugglers continue to exploit to carry drugs to our shores and streets.

Looking to the East, across the Heartland, lie our Inland Rivers and Great Lakes -- the arteries of our maritime transportation system. The Gulf of Mexico with its vast, resources and farther still, the Atlantic Ocean, which, for the past two centuries, has dominated the focus of our operations.

To the West, lies the deep Pacific, a vital source of fish the world depends upon - and beyond . . . the Asia Pacific - the world's fastest growing region - home to more than half the global population - whose emerging markets and global trade (most of it carried by sea) are creating new jobs and opportunities. For trade to flow, shipping lanes must remain open, ports must be safe, and cargo secure.

The President recently stated that America will enhance its presence in the Pacific. Our Coast Guard has patrolled these waters for over a century and half. In 1849, the first cutter arrived on the west coast. And, in 1867, on the day Alaska became a U.S. territory, it was a Revenue Cutter that transported the U.S. delegation into Sitka.

Our crews sounded and charted the Pacific as we enforced federal law, aided distressed mariners, fought and died in wars, and maintained a continuous sovereign presence. While conducting these missions we developed strong, and what are now long-standing partnerships.

As the United States looks to expand its leadership in the Pacific, our combination of maritime, military, and law enforcement authorities, and experience in Pacific operations makes us even more valuable to the Nation. The Coast Guard offers the President unique national security options. The renewed strategic focus on the Pacific further validates our decision to retain separate Atlantic and Pacific Area commands.

Our experience has also taught us that what you need to operate on the high-seas - whether it's in the Atlantic or Pacific - are modern, capable, multi-mission high-endurance cutters and aircraft. We are working hard to get them. Directly behind me you can also SEE the future - the National Security Cutter Bertholf - the first of our new major cutters.

AND, she has shown us what the future holds - her speed, endurance and state-of-the-art detection capabilities stopped drug smugglers in the Eastern Pacific - and her superior sea keeping abilities allowed her to launch and recover boats and helicopters in the Bering Sea . . . under conditions our old cutters could not. The National Security Cutter . . . the NSC - is proving to be a vital instrument for protecting American maritime security and prosperity.

Of course, I know that your hard work is taking place not just in the Pacific - but throughout the maritime domain . . . Coast Guard men and women - active duty, reserve, Auxiliarists and civilians - are on watch, ever vigilant.

America is, first and foremost, a maritime nation. 95% of our foreign trade arrives - or is shipped by sea - the Maritime Transportation System accounts for nearly 700 Billion dollars of the U.S. gross domestic product and 51 Million U.S. jobs. Our Nation's economy and its security depend upon maritime commerce. And our Coast Guard provides for its safe and secure approach to our shores.

I have long believed that the greatness of a nation can be measured by the resources that it provides for mariners to safely and securely approach its shores. By that measure, our Nation is the undisputed world leader in that it produced the United States Coast Guard . . . a unique merger of military, maritime, law enforcement, regulatory, marine safety and first response capabilities . . . it's no coincidence that so many other countries seek to emulate our Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard's value to the Nation has never been greater.

So where are we? What is the State of the Coast Guard today?

A year ago we took a fix and charted a course. This year's fix finds us on track, with a good speed of advance . . . but we are Navigating Uncertain and Stormy Seas.

Our Nation has made hard decisions to cut our deficit - and to put our fiscal house in order - these decisions include reductions in defense spending - reductions in our Department's spending - and after a decade of significant budgetary growth . . . they will likely include reductions in Coast Guard spending.

This challenging environment will require us to identify efficiencies, eliminate redundancies, and reinvest savings in the highest priority activities.

The de-commissioning of high endurance cutters and patrol boats and the tightening of staffs in 2013 budget will reduce our personnel strength by over 1,000 people . . . but this is necessary to make room to bring on our new assets.

We will do this, but in a deliberate way that ensures we deliver the level of Coast Guard services our Nation needs, targeting reductions in certain areas while investing in key initiatives to rebuild our Service. These decisions will provide the Coast Guard with the capabilities and force structure it needs for the next 40 years - and the tools you need to perform our missions safely and successfully now.

We will not allow our Service to become a hollow operational force.

We will not allow our mission support capacity to be reduced to the point where we cannot maintain acceptable levels of readiness.

What we will do is work with the Department, the Administration and the Congress to determine our budget priorities . . . and those activities that we may reduce in the short term, so we can do all our Nation requires of us in the long term.

But what is the proper balance? How do we position ourselves for success? These are decisions that call for leadership - at all levels of our Service.

So, today I'm going to speak to you as a sailor . . . I don't apologize for that . . . after all, we are a maritime Service. My experiences as a ship captain, navigator and cutterman have formed my view of the world.

And in my career as a sailor, I have found that no matter how severe the storm, no matter how difficult the problem, you continue to work, struggle, and fight . . . and you rely on your shipmates . . . because ultimately the weather will change, and conditions will improve. In sailors, I believe this instills a sense of optimism and faith. As we face our immediate challenges, I want you to know that there is good reason for optimism and faith.

In my experience, there are four consistent lessons for what it takes to safely navigate uncertain and stormy seas:

**Lesson one**, you need a well trained crew that is proficient in their jobs;  
**Lesson two**, you need well crafted Standing Orders to guide the crew;  
**Lesson three**, you need a sound ship, that is equipped to take on all threats and hazards; and,  
**Lesson four**, YOU need to take care of your crew - and their families.

So, what have we done to prepare our Service to navigate uncertain and stormy seas?

### **Lesson one: Preparing the Crew...**

You will recall that last year I spoke to you about sustaining mission excellence through proficiency. Proficiency goes well beyond training and qualification. It is also experience, seasoning, a commitment to excellence, and the continuous pursuit of the mastery of your craft. During all hands meetings this year, I have been asked frequently to define "proficiency."

Well . . . during a recent visit to a Coast Guard Station, I asked the crew: Who is the best boat coxswain? . . . the hands of a half dozen Boatswain's Mates immediately went up . . . so I rephrased the question . . . if the Search and Rescue alarm sounded and YOU had to go out in a severe storm, who would you want to be the coxswain of the motor life boat . . . well then everyone pointed to the Commanding Officer . . . a warrant boatswain, a surfman with decades of experience. That's mastery of your craft. You know it when you see it.

Whether in the operational arts - or mission support and other disciplines . . . each of us has a duty to “Pursue Perfection” . . . and achieve excellence . . . Our new assets will be only as good as the men and women who crew them.

Commanding Officers and Officers in Charge are responsible for leading their units, and Chief Petty Officers are responsible for leading from the front regardless of whether it’s on the deckplates . . . or the hangar decks.

We have renewed our emphasis on traditional concepts of leadership, not the latest management fads. In particular, we’ve focused on command . . . command authority, responsibility and accountability.

We are now conducting screening panels for all command positions, whether operational or support . . . we’re also requiring that ALL prospective Commanding Officers - whether afloat or ashore - attend pre-command training courses.

We have completed and continue to implement the results of the Aviation Safety Assessment Action Plan . . . it emphasizes command and leadership involvement from commanding officers to the aircrews... on the flight decks and hangar decks.

Last year, I expressed my grave concern over mounting accidents and deaths. I realize that the deaths of Coast Guardsmen, and the losses of aircraft, boats or cutters - in extraordinary circumstances - may very well be inevitable.

But we will never allow it to be considered as the cost of doing business.

Finally, in order to build maritime experience and credibility, we’re sending more of our new officers to afloat assignments.

Over the past year, we reviewed our Deployable Specialized Forces, or “DSF” concept, from Stem-to-Stern - based on this review, I decided to place the DSF under the Pacific Area and Atlantic Area commanders to assign clear authority, responsibility and accountability for managing our DSF in synchronization with the shore-based and maritime patrol forces.

To enhance proficiency, we extended tour lengths in select DSF billets to six years . . . we have also standardized their equipment - and created a DSF center of excellence at the Special Mission Training Center.

We have established a Force Readiness Command - it stands as the center of excellence for training and standardization.

And, we have established a Director of Operational Logistics, or the DOL. The DOL is directly responsible for delivering mission support through our Base Commands . . . In April, we will complete conversion of all the fractured support units into 13 regional Base

Commands . . . this will make a singular Commanding Officer at each base responsible and accountable for all mission support services.

Proficiency is Step 1 to weathering heavy seas.

To meet the challenges ahead, we need you to be the best.

The best aviators, cuttermen, and boat crews.

The best boarding officers, marine inspectors and engineers.

And just as importantly, we need the best acquisition professionals, financial managers, and lawyers . . . and the best trainers and educators.

Being in the Coast Guard is not a part-time job. It's a full-time commitment. We do dangerous things. That's just the nature of our work.

Working on the water or over the water, is not a natural environment for human beings. But this is where the Coast Guard operates all the time. The complexity of performing any mission on the water is significantly multiplied - particularly in darkness and foul weather. If we are going to do it - and we are - we are going to do it right. I am counting on leaders at every level to make this happen.

### **Lesson two: Standing orders**

Last year I mentioned to you that we gained many new responsibilities and resources post-September 11, 2001 . . . but, because of the high operational tempo, we did not have an opportunity to write the standing orders...

We're making it a priority to do so now!

Today I am releasing Coast Guard Publication 3.0 . . . enduring doctrine which describes in detail how and why the Coast Guard conducts operations. And, how our operations provide value to the Nation . . . it is posted on our web site.

Over the next month, I will release additional guidance that describes how our forces and missions are synchronized . . . I am committed to providing you clear guidance on how I expect you to carry out and perform our missions...

**Lesson three: Once you have a well prepared crew and standing orders, you then need the equipment to do the job.**

I am pleased to report that we're making progress with rebuilding our fleet of cutters, aircraft and boats.

Since last year, we have awarded contracts to construct the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> National Security Cutters. We've also received funding for NSC #6 long lead time materials... two things made this possible: the strong support of the Congress, and the excellent work of our acquisition workforce.

We are also grateful to Secretary Napolitano and the President for requesting full-funding in the 2013 budget to complete NSC # 6 . . . as well as money to continue the Offshore Patrol Cutter, or OPC project.

We have 18 new Fast Response patrol boats on contract, and we'll commission the first one in April.

Response Boats Medium -

We have delivered 82 boats to date - and we will receive 30 more this year.

We have accepted 13 new "Ocean Sentry" Maritime Patrol Aircraft - and numbers 14 and 15 are under contract . We have six missionized C-130J Maritime Patrol Aircraft numbers 7 and 8 are under contract, and thanks to Congress' support, we will begin building the 9<sup>th</sup> later this year.

We are upgrading all our helicopters with state-of-the-art avionics to extend their service life, increase the safety of our crews, and most importantly, save lives.

We have deployed the Rescue 21 distress communications system throughout most of the continental United States, including the Great Lakes. By the end of this year, Rescue 21 will be operational in Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Guam.

**Lesson four: To weather any storm, you must take care of your people - your crew, and their families.**

Over the past year we achieved some significant milestones.

We've focused our transfer policies on greater geographic and family stability for our people . . . and as a result, we have reduced costs for our service and our families, and contributed to better continuity and experience at our units.

Housing - we have completed a comprehensive survey of our housing needs and inventory. And, we have centralized the accountability for our more than 4,000 housing units right here at the Civil Engineering Unit in Oakland. This focused responsibility has improved oversight and accelerated improvement projects.

Childcare - We've expanded eligibility for our Child Care Subsidy program - while the program's focus remains to provide maximum assistance to our families with the lowest incomes, eligibility has been expanded to even more families.

We've hired 7 training and curriculum specialists for our Child Development Centers, this will allow us to continue providing the best programs possible - and we've hired 5 regional dependent care specialists. . . they will assist with setting up home care in our military housing areas.

We have added a new ombudsman program manager, who is now supported by a regional ombudsman coordinator for the Atlantic Area - and we are working to bring on a Pacific Area coordinator . . . these full-time coordinators will assist our current cadre of volunteer ombudsman . . . but my hope is that with their support, we will also soon have volunteer ombudsmen at every Coast Guard unit.

Our Chaplains Corps is conducting marriage retreats, communication workshops, and personal growth seminars to strengthen our families.

We've even brought someone on full-time to develop a retiree affairs program.

We will continue to advocate and support our loved ones who sacrifice on the homefront so Coast Guard men and women can remain always ready to perform frontline operations.

Those 4 lessons - (a well trained crew, well-crafted standing orders, a sound ship, and taking care of your crew and their families) are how you prepare to navigate uncertain and stormy seas.

Now, what about the how? How will we continue to carry out our operations in the face of heavy weather?

As we describe in Pub 3, we've organized our operational assets into a maritime trident of shore based, maritime patrol, and deployable specialized forces.

We will deploy these forces individually, or in combination, throughout the maritime domain. Our core operational concept is Prevention - Response.

We seek to prevent dangerous or illicit maritime actions as far from our shores as possible, while providing safe navigation for mariners in legitimate commerce. When undesirable or unlawful events do occur - we will respond to protect the Nation, minimize the impact, and recover.

Preventing and responding to threats before they reach our ports is not a new idea. In 1787, the father of our Service, Alexander Hamilton wrote, "A few armed vessels, judiciously stationed at the entrances of our ports, might at a small expense be made useful sentinels of the laws."

Hamilton's vision remains true today. It's just that in today's globalized and interconnected world - the functional entrances to our ports are no longer at the mouths of our harbors, but far offshore. To effectively accomplish Hamilton's objective - and our current mandate - we have to be in overseas ports, on the high seas, along our coasts and in our domestic ports... we must be able to capably operate in all areas of the maritime domain.

Our layered strategy of providing maritime security is designed to accomplish this objective.

Let's begin overseas . . . our International Port Security Liaison Officers, or "IPSLOs", are working in foreign ports to ensure the security of cargo and ships before they sail to our shores.

We continue to lead the U.S. delegation to the International Maritime Organization . . . to set standards for maritime safety, security and stewardship.

This year is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the loss of the Titanic. Yet 100 years later, the Costa Concordia's recent loss reminds us of the importance of having safety at sea standards . . . and, that to ensure compliance, you need a robust marine inspection program.

Now let's take a look at our ports and coastlines . . . This is our best-resourced layer. We have recapitalized almost our entire fleet of boats . . . we are in the process of recapitalizing all our coastal patrol boats . . . we have repopulated our shore stations that were scaled back due to budget cuts in the 1990s . . . and, we have also added deployable security teams for our ports.

But, the last place we want to discover maritime threats is in our ports! My most pressing concern is on the high seas . . . vast oceans lie between overseas loading ports and our domestic ports of arrival. It is in this offshore region that I see the greatest risk.

Patrolling the high seas requires multi-mission cutters and maritime patrol aircraft capable of sustained offshore operations. These assets are the most expensive to acquire and operate. Much of our current fleet of high and medium endurance cutters is beyond 40 years old - costly to repair, and in need of replacement.

Coast Guardsmen require modern ships capable of independently operating on the high seas to perform missions like drug interdiction. These cutters enable us to stop multi-ton loads of pure cocaine before they reach our shores and to protect our fish stocks and fisherman in the tumultuous Bering Sea.

This is why I am so pleased the NSC is already proving to be a more than worthy replacement for our obsolete cutters.

This is also why we must sustain the momentum of the NSC and OPC acquisition programs.

As I alluded to earlier, we also face another unique demand in the Pacific - the emerging Arctic frontier.

This summer exploratory oil drilling will likely commence in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. In this part of Northern Alaska, we currently have no shore-based infrastructure, such as hangars for our planes, bases for our boats or barracks for our crews.

So, we're going to send mobile, versatile infrastructure to the Arctic . . . the National Security Cutter BERTHOLF . . . BERTHOLF has world-wide communications and state-of-the-art command and control systems - better than any shore station - she also brings the added advantage of being able to launch and recover helicopters and small boats. BERTHOLF will be supplemented by our ice-capable seagoing buoy tenders.

We feel prepared to take on these challenges because we have adaptable cutters and aircraft, and proficient crews . . . we will employ them on a seasonal basis - while we continue to define our requirements for permanent Arctic infrastructure.

The Coast Guard is unique - we have the experience to participate in, and lead where appropriate, the development of our National Arctic strategy - but, the imperative for expanded Coast Guard capabilities in the Arctic is now - not 20 years from now.

Recently, the eyes of the Nation were focused on Cutter HEALY as she broke through hundreds of miles of Arctic ice to enable a tanker to deliver fuel to Nome, Alaska.

Coast Guard polar ice breakers are the only ships in our national inventory capable of performing this mission, and right now, HEALY is our only operational polar ice breaker. We are working hard to return POLAR STAR to operations in 2013 - and when she returns, we will regain one of the most powerful conventional ice breakers in the world - and another 10 years of service from her.

I want to be clear. This is only a bridging strategy. As I mentioned earlier, this is an example of scaling back where we must in the short term, so that we can do all that our Nation requires of us in the long term.

We need to come to a Whole of Government determination on the capabilities and resourcing our Nation must provide to protect our Arctic interests.

Early in my career . . . there was a time when the Coast Guard operated 8 polar ice breakers. How did that happen? In 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt passed a hand written note to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau - Morgenthau passed the note on to the Commandant, Admiral Russell Waesche, - it simply read, "Henry I want the world's best icebreakers, [signed] FDR"

I guess Federal acquisition Rules must have been easier then!

Times are different now, but FDR's order is the kind of action a visionary leader takes to prepare a Nation to navigate stormy seas.

In even more difficult circumstances, in the midst of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the President and the Congress chose to invest in America's Coast Guard. They built a class of 7 new major Coast Guard cutters - the 327-foot Treasury class. Why?

Because leaders foresaw that America in the future required capable multi-mission ships to meet its challenges - the challenges that were known - but more importantly, future challenges that could not be known - but were certain to come.

These seven major cutters carried out missions never imagined in their original concept of operations. Most of these cutters served for more than 40 years -- The last was decommissioned at over 50 years of age.

They were able to do this because national leaders with vision foresaw that capable ships with . . . speed . . . endurance . . . and versatility were a sound investment against an uncertain, and what proved to be menacing, half century to come.

Secretary Napolitano understands this. That's why she continues to support our ongoing efforts to recapitalize - and specifically to build NSC #6.

The story of our 378-foot high endurance cutters is strikingly similar... they are also a class of ships that, though they are failing, survive today - they have served for more than 40 years...in combat off Vietnam - in coalition operations off Iraq - protecting our fisheries - interdicting drugs - working to prevent mass migrations from Haiti and Cuba - and saving countless lives . . . the 378s have served well beyond their time.

We know from experience that building multi-mission cutters and aircraft is a proven WAY to prepare for uncertain times - doing so keeps our Nation safe, our Service ready, and our domestic industries - which create American jobs - skilled and strong.

Most importantly, we know that the ships, aircraft and boats we buy today will not just shape . . . But . . . in large part, will define the Coast Guard's next 50 years of capability - They will be the primary tools that we rely on to do our job - responding to all threats, and all hazards throughout America's maritime domain.

So, what are these Uncertain and Stormy seas?

Dynamic and evolving threats are increasing in the global maritime domain: illicit drug and human trafficking, piracy, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, illegal fishing, environmental crimes, and belligerent nation-states.

These stormy seas are also budget driven. The current national deficit demands change. On our current trackline, we will likely see the Coast Guard get smaller. We may also encounter those who seek to sacrifice long term investments - like recapitalizing our cutters, aircraft and boats - for short term budget gains.

But, we have faced tough times like this before . . . And, as any ship Captain can tell you, the most important element to weathering a storm is a great crew. And, we are truly blessed to have one in you.

We all come from a long blue line of Coast Guardsmen who have confronted heavy weather and prevailed in the face of seemingly in-surmountable challenges.

60 years ago this month, Boatswains Mate First Class Bernie Webber, was the coxswain of a 36-foot motor lifeboat . . . his crew headed out into 60 foot seas . . . and 70 knot winds . . . in near blizzard conditions off Cape Cod to rescue 32 men, one by one, from the tanker Pendleton . . . broken in two by the storm.

I am honored that the first of our new Sentinel Class response cutters will be named after this heroic Boatswain's Mate.

Richard Etheridge was the first African-American to command a life saving station - Station Pea Island - this was also the first life saving station crewed entirely by African Americans. Keeper Etheridge never backed down in the face of adversity. Soon after taking command, his lifesaving station burned to the ground. He did not hesitate. He rebuilt it.

He also understood the importance of proficiency - he developed rigorous lifesaving drills. He constantly tested his crew until he was satisfied they could take on any mission - the Pea Island surfmen would go on to rescue hundreds of souls from stranded ships in the most extreme conditions - Etheridge's station became known as the best on the Carolina coast - and he became a legend.

It is a point of personal pride that our second fast response cutter will be named Richard Etheridge - who is not only a Coast Guard icon - but for me, a model for the importance of proficiency.

And, Seaman Apprentice William Flores, who died while saving the lives of his shipmates after the Cutter Blackthorn collided with the tanker Capricorn.

"Billy" as his shipmates called him, was just 19 years old. He was less than a year out of boot camp - one of the least experienced crewmen on board. But, when Blackthorn capsized, he took off his belt, strapped open a lifejacket locker door . . . which freed lifejackets to float to the surface . . . he then remained behind to assist other crewmembers.

In doing so, he displayed amazing courage. He also gave his own life to save others.

I am deeply humbled by his service and sacrifice - our third fast response cutter will bear the name William Flores as a constant reminder of the heroic deeds even our youngest Coast Guardsmen are capable of.

What a Service we have . . . to name an entire class of ships after enlisted heroes . . . it's extraordinary... but this is our heritage...And it continues today.

With people like Aviation Survival Technician 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Thomas McArthur . . . who, in an incredible display of bravery, made 12 consecutive rescues of individuals overcome by strong rip currents in Lake Michigan . . . for his actions he was awarded the Silver Lifesaving Medal.

And cuttermen like the crew of HEALY - represented here today by HEALY's Captain - Beverly Havlik, Command Senior Chief Brian Apolito and BM3 Diana Milian.

Last month, this crew accomplished something that had never been done before - they broke through hundreds of miles of ice to deliver fuel to the residents of Nome, Alaska . . . it was a shared moment of pride for our entire service!

Your efforts - and those of the long blue line of Coast Guardsmen who have gone before us - stand as a testament to human courage, seamanship, airmanship and skill . . . you showed the Nation once again what a small crew of dedicated Coast Guardsmen can do - and how our Service remains true to our motto - Semper Paratus - Always Ready to assist those in distress!

I feel so proud, yet so humbled to be your Commandant . . . you protect people on the sea, you protect our country against threats delivered by the sea, and YOU even protect the sea itself.

It is the strength of you - our crew - that allows us to keep doing it... and if we can continue to provide you with the cutters, boats and aircraft you need to perform our missions, we will ensure America's Coast Guard remains Semper Paratus well into our 3<sup>rd</sup> century of service to the Nation.

Now I'm an optimist . . . but during the few times I start to get discouraged, it's only because too many in our country seem to view these uncertain and stormy seas as reasons for doom and dismay - they claim our country is in decline - and that our best years just might be behind us. One thing I'm sure of . . . these people have never met anyone from my crew.

Because as we prepare for and proceed into heavy weather it is your commitment to excellence, your spirit, and your professionalism that will continue to fuel my optimism . . . eventually the weather will improve.

The key to navigating safely through uncertain and stormy seas is the same today as it has been for centuries - it's having a crew of strong, dedicated and disciplined men and women - and fortunately we have you in abundance in the Coast Guard.

When the storm clouds drive others for safe harbors, we head out...

To those who doubt our ability to navigate through the years ahead, I have a message for you:

We do not fear uncertain and stormy seas - that's when you need us most!

And, that's when we're at our best!

We're Coast Guardsmen.

This is our chosen profession. This is our way. This is what we do.

Thank you.

Semper Paratus.