

**Future of the Homeland Security Missions of the Coast Guard
House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
Opening Statement by the Commandant
February 4, 2014**

Good morning, Madame Chair, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and other distinguished members of this subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today, and for your unwavering support for our Coast Guard. I am honored to be here to represent those brave men and women who have chosen to serve our great nation.

And I am especially mindful of those men and women today. I have attended three memorials in the past week, each of which drove home to me once again the dangerous work we do, and the selfless dedication of those who do it. The first two were in Florida in memory of our shipmates aboard the Coast Guard Cutter BLACKTHORN, which sank 34 years ago this past week with the loss of 23 Coast Guardsmen. The third was in California for Boatswain's Mate Third Class Travis Obendorf of the National Security Cutter WAESCHE. He was mortally wounded during a rescue operation in the Bering Sea, and recently succumbed to his injuries.

It was a fresh reminder to me that downstream from every decision we make here in Washington are young men and women who are often cold, and wet and tired, and who stand the watch to keep our Homeland safe.

I am here today to discuss the Coast Guard's homeland security missions. But before I begin, I would like to thank the Members of the subcommittee for their support in passing the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014*. This Act will help relieve the erosive effects of sequestration on our Service. It will restore front-line operations and badly needed training hours, and ease many of the personnel management restrictions we have faced over this past year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Secretary Jeh Johnson for his clear leadership and support since his confirmation to lead the Department of Homeland Security. I deeply appreciate his concern for our people and his strong advocacy for our Service's critical recapitalization needs.

America is a maritime nation, and we rely on the safe, secure and free flow of goods across the seas and into our ports and waterways. I firmly believe that one measure of a nation's greatness is its ability to provide safe and secure approaches to its ports. This system of uninterrupted trade is the lifeblood of our economy.

For more than two centuries the Coast Guard has safeguarded America's maritime interests and kept those approaches secure. As the Nation's maritime first responder, we protect those on the sea, we protect the Nation from threats delivered by the sea, and we protect the sea itself.

Every day the Coast Guard acts to both *prevent* and *respond* to an array of threats that, if left unchecked, would impede trade, weaken our economy and create instability. These threats

disrupt regional and global security, the economies of our partner nations, and access to both resources and international trade. All of these are vital elements of our national prosperity, and in turn our national security.

In previous testimony I used the term “layered security” to describe the way the Coast Guard counters maritime threats facing the United States. This layered security strategy first begins in foreign ports and spans the high seas, because the best place to counter a threat is *before* it reaches our borders. It then encompasses our exclusive economic zone and territorial seas, and continues into our ports and inland waters.

Overseas, our International Port Security Program assesses foreign ports on security and antiterrorism measures. Since the inception of this program in 2004, Coast Guard personnel have visited more than 150 countries and 1,300 port facilities. Vessels sailing from ports where effective antiterrorism measures are not in place face conditions of entry requiring them to implement additional security measures or subjecting them to additional inspection *before* they arrive in our ports.

Our Nation faces a range of risks and vulnerabilities that continue to grow and evolve. The global economy is spurring investment in ever larger vessels to ship goods across the seas. The arctic is seeing exponential increases in vessel traffic and human activity. And we continue to see persistent efforts by terrorists and transnational criminal networks to exploit the maritime environment.

It is the Coast Guard’s responsibility to detect and interdict contraband and illegal drug traffic, enforce U.S. immigration laws, protect valuable natural resources, and counter threats to U.S. maritime and economic security worldwide. And it is often most effective to do this as far from our shores as possible.

A capable offshore fleet of cutters is critical to the layered security approach – and this is the area that causes me the greatest concern.

Our fleet of major cutters has reached obsolescence and is becoming increasingly expensive to maintain. The average Reliance-class Medium Endurance Cutter is forty-six years old; the oldest turns *fifty* this year.

I sailed aboard one of these cutters, the VALIANT, as a cadet at the Coast Guard Academy. By the time I was commissioned, VALIANT had been sailing the better part of a decade. Due solely to the determination of our cuttermen, naval engineers, and our modernized mission support system, VALIANT will still be sailing when I leave the Service this May after nearly 40 years.

But as good as our people and support systems are, this is no longer sustainable. Three of these cutters needed emergency drydock repairs this year to repair failing hulls.

I am fully aware of the fiscal constraints we face as a nation. But, we must continue to support development of the Offshore Patrol Cutter. I am committed to working with the Department, the

Administration and the Congress to ensure we can achieve the Coast Guard's critical recapitalization needs in an affordable manner.

Closer to home, we work with interagency, intergovernmental, and commercial partners to patrol maritime approaches, escort vessels, monitor critical infrastructure, and inspect port facilities. These partnerships continue to enhance our capability and effectiveness along our coasts and waterways.

To maximize the effectiveness of our efforts, we are a member of the National Intelligence Community. We screen ships, crews, and passengers bound for the United States before they reach our ports. Using our Maritime Intelligence Fusion Centers and Intelligence Coordination Center, we work hand in hand with Customs and Border Protection to analyze arriving vessels and highlight potential risks.

Last year, we collectively screened more than 126,000 vessels and over 30 million people seeking to enter the United States. These efforts enhance Maritime Domain Awareness – a key element that supports the DHS layered security strategy.

As the Nation's Maritime Governance force, the Coast Guard's possesses unique authorities, capabilities and partnerships. Coupled with capable cutters, aircraft and boats, operated by highly proficient personnel, we maximize those authorities and capabilities to execute layered security throughout the entire maritime domain. And our many partnerships facilitate the integration of federal resources with state and local capabilities. We are a ready force on continuous watch with the proven ability to surge assets and our people to crisis events when and where they occur.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions