

2020 STATE OF THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

“WHY I SERVE”

ADMIRAL KARL SCHULTZ

Good Afternoon. It's great to be here in Charleston, once again, WITH OUR PEOPLE! 230 years ago, the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, recognized that America's prosperity depended on securing our ports, facilitating the flow of commerce, and establishing common rules for maritime trade. Hamilton insightfully created what would become the United States Coast Guard. For well over two centuries, we have protected, defended, saved, and shielded the American people. Today, I am proud to stand before you as the Commandant of the “World's Best Coast Guard” and tell the story of WHY WE SERVE.

To Serve: THAT'S our promise to the public. Over the past year, you saw us first on scene following the horrific destruction of Hurricane Dorian – the largest most devastating storm to hit The Bahamas. Millions watched in awe as a Coast Guardsman fearlessly leapt onto a narco sub traversing the Eastern Pacific Ocean. National Security Cutter BERTHOLF plied the Taiwan Straits to promote free and open access to the seas and adherence to the “Rules Based Order.” Coast Guard service members rescued 24 trapped crewmembers from the overturned 650-foot GOLDEN RAY, including four confined for over 30 hours in 140 degree engine room spaces.

But, we did not become the world's best by resting on our laurels. From our humble beginnings with just 10 wooden Brigantine sailing vessels, through today where our iconic racing stripe, branded on our cutters and aircraft, is recognized as a symbol of responsible maritime governance. YOUR Coast Guard serves across the globe to advance American security and prosperity. We are an indispensable arm of the United States Armed Forces, and a vital component of the Department of Homeland Security.

As I reflect on the past year, I couldn't be prouder of the men and women who answer our nation's call to serve. Last March I stood with our people in Los Angeles to chart a course for the future. Since then, we've put tools in the hands of our frontline operators, including the fast-track deployment of ScanEagle unmanned aircraft systems, and continue to achieve significant progress towards fielding our next generation of cutters. And we updated our personnel and assignment policies, including important changes to our weight and body composition program addressing disparities across our uniformed workforce.

We've seen overwhelming demand for our initiative to employ Coast Guard Reservists to backfill primary caregivers on parental leave. We also began testing new electronic health records and launched a modern credentialing system for our enlisted workforce.

Our Service has never been more relevant. Your Coast Guard is found at the intersection of great power competition and economic prosperity... fostering maritime stability and genuine “human-to-human” partnership.

As a Service, we are rightfully proud of our ability to lead in crisis, but our greatest value is in preventing crises in the first place. There is no agency better suited than the United States Coast Guard to lead in the maritime domain and to uphold worldwide institutions founded on the principles of freedom, sovereign rights, and liberty.

As we enter a new decade, the number 2020 itself connotes keen vision, and I see both challenges and opportunities confronting our Service – an inflection point of sorts as I approach the mid-point of my tenure as Commandant. So, today, I offer you a “clear-eyed view” of our path forward and the acknowledgement that we have much work to do to achieve our goals.

In a constantly evolving environment, we cannot remain the world’s best Coast Guard, we cannot be “*Always Ready*” when America needs us, unless we think and act differently. Unless we continually hone our operational tradecraft. Unless we continue to develop a positive culture that promotes respect, diversity and inclusion through strong leadership at all levels. Unless we develop our people and continually earn and maintain the public trust.

Now, let’s take a look at how we serve. Just outside is National Security Cutter JAMES... these cutters are the flagship of the Coast Guard’s modernized fleet with automated weapons systems, state-of-the-art command and control equipment, and advanced sensors. JAMES recently returned from a two-month deployment, where these modern systems and capabilities enabled them to stop dangerous drug cartels from smuggling over 13,000 pounds of narcotics.

Since the implementation of our Western Hemisphere Strategy four years ago, the men and women of the Coast Guard have interdicted 2 million pounds of pure cocaine worth 26 billion dollars. This vitally important work is the most effective way to help thwart cartels from trafficking their illicit products. Crews like those aboard Cutter JAMES battle these dangerous cartels.

[Video: LPV Interdiction] During JAMES’s deployment, their armed helicopter crew shot out the engines of a low-profile vessel, a stealthy craft built for the sole purpose of smuggling drugs. In today’s introductory video, you met Ensign DiRado.

He led a boarding team to apprehend the suspects; however, once on scene they realized the low profile vessel was sinking. They quickly removed the traffickers and slowed the flooding long enough to salvage the deadly narcotics and preserve critical evidence to support prosecution of the drug smugglers.

In fact, Ensign DiRado is here with us today. Ensign DiRado, please stand. OUTSTANDING WORK SHIPMATE!

Your leadership and skills exemplify the traits I look for in every Coastie.

Drug cartels are actively harming Americans and our way of life. They traffic drugs, weapons, and people, causing instability and violence in Central America that drives migrants north. And, their illicit commodities

destined for U.S. soil devastate American families... setting records for drug-related deaths each year. THIS IS WHY WE SERVE!

Additionally, great power competitors like China and Russia are gaining influence right here in the Western Hemisphere by exploiting opportunities amidst the instability and weak governance fueled by transnational criminal activities. Our efforts in the Western Hemisphere are critical, and we are using every tool to combat this scourge.

Our network of embedded Coast Guardsmen in the region strengthen like-minded friends and allies. For the FIRST TIME in the history of the multi-decade maritime drug campaign, this past year our partner nations' accounted for HALF of the Transit Zone drug interdictions.

This success is noteworthy, but only a hint of what we hope for in the future. Upholding the "rule of law", and dismantling these insidious cartels furthers stability and enables our Western Hemisphere partners to protect their sovereign-interests against our global competitors.

Our Offshore Patrol Cutters - which will become the backbone of our modernized fleet - will have a critical role in this campaign. The first in its class, Cutter ARGUS, is already under construction and will be delivered in 2022. The Offshore Patrol Cutter program is set to deliver 25 hulls and that fleet will ultimately comprise almost SEVENTY PERCENT of our offshore presence.

Our near-peer adversaries don't just stop at financial entrapment of vulnerable countries. They are actively exploiting other nations' natural resources, including fish stocks. In many cases challenging the sovereignty of smaller or less developed nations. China, with the world's largest distant water fishing fleet, is one of the worst predatory fishing offenders, engaging in what we call Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated Fishing—or IUU. This is far more than just about conservation and sustainability, this is a national security challenge warranting a clear response.

Fish is an essential protein source for over 40 percent of the global population, and fish stocks around the world are critical to many nations' sovereignty and economic security. Even by the most conservative estimates, IUU fishing accounts for more than a \$23 billion annual loss to the global economy.

The United States Coast Guard can be a global leader combatting IUU fisheries by increasing partner-nation capacity, international cooperation, and targeted operations. To frame our expanding efforts to counter IUU fishing around the world, we are developing a progressive IUU Strategic Outlook for the Coast Guard, which we plan to release in late summer.

And, to enhance maritime domain awareness across the Pacific Ocean we are fostering a partnership with Global Fishing Watch, which uses cutting-edge machine learning and artificial intelligence to visualize, track, and share data about fishing activity in near real-time. If successful, this initiative may be scaled to our fisheries enforcement efforts worldwide.

Today, the United States holds sixteen counter-IUU fishing bilateral agreements in the Pacific and West Africa. And we are pursuing additional agreements to help us push back against the destructive fishing practices that are leaving vast expanses of the ocean and seabed in ruins. As a recent Stimson Center Report indicates, to stop IUU fishing we must increase accountability and help coastal nations improve their maritime domain awareness.

We call upon like-minded nations across the globe to join us, in publically denouncing countries and corporations that engage in IUU fishing, and enhance enforcement activities that thwart this threat.

Nowhere is this more important than the Indo-Pacific – where we serve to uphold America’s enduring interests. This swath of ocean is the epicenter of global maritime trade and geostrategic influence.

Many of these Pacific Island Countries, and even American island territories, lack the capability and capacity to fully police their sovereign waters, making them vulnerable to a spectrum of illicit activity. We are most concerned by coercive state’s influence operations, intentions to construct dual-use infrastructure projects, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed their strategic agenda. In the face of antagonistic behavior, the United States Coast Guard offers transparent engagement and partnership.

We aspire to remain the preferred and enduring partner in the region, tailoring and synchronizing our services with other like-minded partners to meet but not overwhelm the absorptive capacity of the nations we support.

Later this year, we will continue Operation AIGA to strengthen the community of island nations in Oceania. By pairing an ocean-going Coast Guard buoy tender and Fast Response Cutters, we will promote “rules-based order,” build capacity, and affirm the United States’ positive and enduring role in the region. And, by the end of the year, we are on track to take delivery of the first two 154-foot Fast Response Cutters to be homeported in Guam. These modern cutters will replace 40-year-old vessels, enhancing all aspects of the Coast Guard’s surface capabilities in the region, including increased range, sea-keeping, crew size, and enhanced cutter boats to support operations.

My Commander’s Intent is to employ our unique authorities and capabilities to complement, not duplicate, Department of Defense efforts. In 2019, we deployed two National Security Cutters, STRATTON and BERTHOLF, for 10 months of uninterrupted support to the Indo-Pacific Combatant Commander. National Security Cutters will return to the Western Pacific again this year for joint operations with the Navy’s Seventh Fleet, including participation in RIMPAC 2020 - the world’s largest multi-national Naval Exercise.

The Coast Guard is also doubling down on “human-to-human” interaction to bolster partner nation capacity building. Last August, our Mobile Training Team from Yorktown, Virginia worked hand-in-hand with the Philippine Coast Guard to stand up their new Outboard Motor Maintenance Center of Excellence. And, last fall I met with another key regional partner, Japan, who is providing the Philippine Coast Guard with two 94

meter Response Vessels in 2022. These endeavors provide the Philippines with the organic capability to build and sustain their enforcement fleet, enabling them to lead regional security efforts.

Like the Philippines, countries around the world see WHY WE SERVE and are modeling themselves after the United States Coast Guard. THE alternative to coercive and predatory engagement is “human-to-human” interaction and robust partnerships. That’s what we do best. Even our junior members provide an outsized impact to our globally strategic missions...

[FN Zheng, CGC STRATTON Vignette]

Fireman Zheng is watching today’s livestream with her Cutter STRATTON shipmates in Alameda, California. Let’s recognize her incredible contributions with a round of applause.

Good luck at Aviation Maintenance Technician School FN Zheng – you’ll be an outstanding addition to our aviation community!

Now imagine thousands of people like Fireman Zheng, each applying his or her own unique talents and contributions across Oceania, demonstrating the full value proposition of the United States Coast Guard.

That’s why I’ve challenged my headquarters staff to work with our colleagues at the Department of State to explore leveraging similar funding models for Oceania that have enabled Coast Guard operations in the Caribbean and Central American corridor for the past 25 years.

Oceania is but one of several emerging geostrategic flashpoints. Now let me tell you how we serve American interests at the furthest ends of the earth. As our Polar Regions become more accessible, foreign competitors seek to encroach on American sovereignty, exploit natural resources, and potentially limit access to shipping routes.

The Coast Guard operates our Nation’s only icebreaker fleet countering malign influence as our Nation’s most persistent surface military presence at the Polar Regions. We do this with just two cutters, one heavy and one medium ice-breaker. This is a woefully unacceptable level of presence in an area where we must be a leading force. PRESENCE EQUALS INFLUENCE – and we must up our game with respect to High Latitude presence!

I just returned from Antarctica, where I met the crew of the 44-year old POLAR STAR charged with ensuring access to our national interests in one of the most remote and unforgiving environments on earth. You met LCDR Karen Kutkiewicz, Operations Officer aboard the POLAR STAR in the introductory video.

[Video: POLAR STAR] Each year, LCDR Kutkiewicz and the crew of POLAR STAR leave their families behind during the holiday season. While underway for their annual Antarctic deployment, the crew not only faces the challenges of the harsh environment, but they must also rely on their grit and ingenuity to keep their aging

vessel in the fight. And then, after their annual deployment to Antarctica, to remain ready for the coming year, they enter a six-month dry dock maintenance period far from their families in Seattle.

The good news is that both the Administration and Congress have duly recognized the burden our POLAR STAR sailors bear to meet the Nation's call. That's why I'm grateful for their recent support to fully fund our new Polar Security Cutter, the first modern heavy icebreaker to be built in the United States in half a century. Additionally, the President requested \$555 million dollars in Fiscal Year 2021 to fully fund our critically needed second Polar Security Cutter, and there's an acquisitions and funding strategy to build a third.

And today we're developing operational requirements for medium ice-breakers. A fleet of at least three Polar Security Cutters, and three medium ice-breakers will ensure American sovereignty and presence in the Polar Regions for decades to come.

Cutter HEALY, our twenty-year old Medium Icebreaker, annually deploys above the Arctic Circle. When HEALY sails this summer, it will do so, yet again, without reliable communications for a large portion of its multi-month patrol.

These challenges are not limited to the Arctic Circle... Just last month, the harsh environment of northern Alaska once again degraded communications equipment. In bitter cold conditions, Petty Officers Rustemeyer, Diko and Chipperini, from Electronic Systems Support Detachment Kodiak, traveled on snow machines until the cold rendered them inoperable. They continued the journey by pulling their heavily loaded sleds, and then dug by hand through several feet of snow in order to effect temporary repairs on-site until weather improves.

As Commandant, I need my operational commanders to be able to communicate with every Coast Guard asset — anytime, anywhere. We are exploring new satellite communications capabilities with the Department of Defense and industry, as well as renewing land-based communications capabilities in Alaska. Arctic communications are a “whole-of-government” issue — we must work together to solve our communication blackout in the Arctic NOW.

Tremendous challenges and opportunities remain in the Polar Regions, and robust partnerships are imperative to success. Through strategic forums, the Coast Guard is a leader, maintaining a safe and prosperous Arctic region where cooperation is paramount, and the eight Arctic States rightfully set the terms of governance. A strong U.S. Coast Guard allows America to lead at these vital frontiers.

Like the Pacific and Arctic, Coast Guard men and women are stationed worldwide in defense of our Nation. Today, as tensions in the Middle East remain heightened, the Coast Guard stands watch on the Arabian Gulf. Six patrol boats and our Advanced Tactical Interdiction teams defend against terrorists, rogue nation states, and smugglers who destabilize the region. And, we are all in, with plans to begin replacing our aging patrol boats with Fast Response Cutters next year, expanding our maritime capabilities in support of U.S. Central

Command. Not only are we on the operational frontlines, our Maritime Engagement Team trains the U.S. Navy, Allied Navies, and Gulf Coalition Countries building partner capacity to further stabilize the Arabian Gulf.

Right here in the homeland, your Coast Guard also enhances security. For the first time ever, we employed DHS's recent congressionally authorized counter-drone authorities to protect over 130 world-leaders who gathered for the United Nations General Assembly in New York City.

Likewise, under delegated DoD authority, Coast Guard Reserve petty officers helped pioneer state-of-the-art drone defense equipment at the Maritime Force Protection Units in both Kings Bay, Georgia and Bangor, Washington. These Coasties provide counter-drone protection for U.S. Navy Ballistic Missile Submarines.

The aforementioned programs are funded by the Department of Defense, but many of our defense contributions are not, leaving the Coast Guard on an unsustainable path to support our growing operational requirements. In contrast, DoD's readiness funding has grown nearly THREE TIMES as much as the Coast Guard's over the past five years despite our services having the same types of readiness challenges. That said, I am grateful to the Administration and Congress for the enacted 2020 budget and the 2021 President's Budget Request which starts us on a healthier funding trajectory.

The long-term solution is to recognize the Coast Guard's crucial role in maintaining our national security. I continue to advocate for a return to a "security" and "non-security" appropriations framework which would help ensure the Coast Guard is funded in parity with the rest of the military services.

A community like Charleston understands just how important our defense contributions are to the Nation. And for generations, the people of this great port city have also appreciated the importance of maritime commerce to our nation. Our interconnected global economy relies on efficient ports and waterways. Over NINETY PERCENT of the world's goods move by sea.

We are clearly a maritime nation, and our marine transportation system generates over 30 million jobs and 5.4 trillion dollars annually in economic activity. Right here... in South Carolina, your ports account for 10 percent of both jobs and gross domestic product for the entire state.

[Charleston Video]

And South Carolina is not alone. The advantages of our Nation's ports and waterways positively affect EVERY American, and EVERY State. THAT IS HOW WE SERVE AMERICAN PROSPERITY.

Today we face unparalleled growth in vessel traffic and complexity within the marine transportation system, from liquefied natural gas exports, to offshore windfarms, to increasingly sophisticated vessels. These factors and a host of others all contribute to an unprecedented demand for Coast Guard services.

Additionally, we see an emerging vulnerability in the increasing cyber-attacks targeting our ports. Over the past year, our new Cyber Protection Team has deployed to cities like New York and New Orleans to aid the

intergovernmental response to malicious cyber-attacks. This year, to better enable our operations, we intend to refresh our Cyber Strategy.

Our people are working around the clock on waterways across the country to keep our maritime industry safe and efficient, ensuring American shelves remain stocked and our vast needs for energy met.

However, the allure of high-paying jobs in the private sector makes it harder EVERY DAY to fill our shortage of qualified marine inspectors who facilitate the flow of commerce, and are typically found in our commissioned officer ranks. Thankfully, the talents of our highly skilled enlisted workforce are helping us fill the gap. This year we are expanding the Enlisted Marine Inspector Program by sixty-three Apprentice positions, and growing seventeen additional inspector billets.

And we are arming those inspectors with enhanced tools to increase mobility and effectiveness. We are testing “INSPECT,” a tablet application that provides access to key Coast Guard databases in the field. However, tools alone are not enough. Gaps in training funding in recent years have atrophied our skills in critical fields of expertise. Hence, we must create a regular training cycle for our marine safety professionals to keep pace with an increasingly complex maritime industry.

Pivoting to shore infrastructure, every mission begins and ends AT a Coast Guard facility. Unfortunately, due to years of flat-line budgets forcing tradeoffs, the facilities that our men and women deploy from and return to are crumbling around them. Forty percent of Coast Guard buildings are over fifty years old. Mold. Leaky roofs. Flooding. Outdated building standards. These have all culminated in a TWO BILLION dollar backlog of facility repairs. Every day that we continue to operate with antiquated infrastructure, it gets harder to protect our modern maritime economy, harder to save those in peril, harder to attract talented men and women into our ranks, and ultimately harder to defend our Nation.

Take for instance, Station Niagara. Last summer, the crew responded to record breaking flooding on the Niagara River and Lake Ontario. For four months, flood waters inundated the station grounds. The crew pumped-out 200,000 gallons of water DAILY, and worked around the clock just to keep their station operational. Despite such challenges, these dedicated Coasties still rescued 45 people and protected our northern border.

But it’s a different story in Houston where the city was devastated by Hurricane Harvey in 2017. There, our modern and resilient Coast Guard facilities – constructed with previous years’ emergency disaster supplemental funding – withstood Harvey’s direct hit enabling the Coast Guard to save NEARLY TWELVE THOUSAND lives. This is the value proposition of fully addressing the Coast Guard’s massive and untenable shore infrastructure backlog.

This is a nationwide challenge, including here in the Low Country. Charleston, similar to other ports across the country, is experiencing unprecedented change. By 2021, Charleston will have the deepest harbor on the East Coast. Nationwide, the Coast Guard has an enduring responsibility to safeguard the marine transportation system and bolster maritime competitiveness, infrastructure improvement, economic prosperity, and national

security. As a future Coast Guard operational center of gravity, NOWHERE do these responsibilities ring more true than RIGHT HERE, in Charleston. Here we will homeport the most capable surface assets in our fleet, including five National Security Cutters and a complement of yet to be built Offshore Patrol Cutters.

Over the next five years, the Coast Guard will work to consolidate our campus along one waterfront. This gives Charleston the potential to grow into the largest concentration of assets and people in the Coast Guard. Today, we are executing 140 million dollars in prior-year hurricane supplemental funding to start upgrading shoreside facilities. But, this funding is only the down payment needed here in Charleston. We need an infusion of persistent investment in the Coast Guard - RIGHT HERE in this great American community.

When dedicated Coasties like Fireman Zheng and LCDR Kutkiewicz return from months at sea thousands of miles away, we owe them a place to call home... A home meeting fundamental needs like sturdy piers, affordable housing, and functional support facilities that ensures they are ALWAYS READY.

Charleston is a first stop to nation-wide investment in our Service, our facilities, and our People. To serve the communities in which we live, we need early adopters like YOU here today, to champion this vision.

The Coast Guard of tomorrow must operate beyond brick and mortar. Rapid industry innovation and sophisticated adversaries are changing the very paradigm of maritime operations. In order to meet these challenges, the Coast Guard requires considerable advances to our 1990s-era hardware, software, and analytics. Years of investment tradeoffs have brought our information technology to the brink of catastrophic failure. Just this past summer over 95 vital systems went offline for several days due to a single server malfunction, impacting our ability to save U.S. citizens, thwart criminals, defend our Nation, and yes, even to simply check our email. Our people will never fail our country, but our technology is failing our people.

That's why we need a "TECH REVOLUTION"...a whole-of-Service effort to empower our people with an information system that is reliable, mobile, and integrated.

In an era where data generates more revenue than oil, it is crucial that the Coast Guard modernizes its data management to help build and sustain its future force. Today, I'm proud to release our "Tech Revolution Road Map" to secure the Service's readiness and digital modernization. Yet another example of how we serve our Coast Guard people.

This revolution starts now. In 2020, we will increase the Service's external internet speeds by 50 times and DOUBLE major cutter connectivity with planned upgrades over the next three years. And, we are placing all of our IT equipment on an industry-standard replacement cycle, reducing the risk of future critical failures and addressing the long-term problem of deferred maintenance.

This spring we will also transition to Microsoft Office 365 in the cloud, to increase email reliability during both day-to-day operations and critical crisis response efforts.

Not only that, but AUXDATA is on schedule to deploy this April...another cloud-based, user-friendly system to manage the outstanding work done by our highly capable 24,000-member volunteer Auxiliary force.

In fact, the AUXDATA procurement team who is watching today's livestream at Headquarters – Ms. Brenda Oberholzer, LT Nicholas Fredericksen, LT Carl Stokes, and Ms. Shandra Kotzun – just earned “*Homeland Security Today's*” Federal Acquisition Excellence Award for their innovative procurement techniques that will deliver this critical software in just over four months.

While we've developed this new road map to a more technologically advanced and effective Coast Guard, we need an injection of funding NOW. Closing our existing 300 million dollar annual IT shortfall is an important step to modernize the Coast Guard's technology landscape.

However, the Coast Guard is not waiting for tomorrow. We are placing our talented men and women at the key intersections of technology, mission, and innovation. Just last month, we cut the ribbon on the “Blue Technology Center of Expertise” in San Diego to better connect the Coast Guard with the tremendous government, academic, and industry innovation ecosystem. This center will create a unique pipeline for the rapid implementation of new maritime technologies into Coast Guard operations around the globe.

This summer, the Coast Guard will also assign a contingent of our brightest minds to the “Defense Innovation Unit” in Silicon Valley to identify capabilities ready for accelerated deployment to solve a host of defense and homeland security problems.

And in this cradle of innovation, last year I had the privilege to personally meet with CEO Tim Cook at Apple Headquarters. While our industries are quite different, our purpose is similar: do the best for our people, provide the highest level of service, and make a positive impact in the world. Much of this starts with technology.

That is why I believe a wholesale investment will enable our talented people to carry out their missions across the maritime domain today and tomorrow.

These dedicated men and women are why READINESS is my top priority for the Coast Guard. And a key component to readiness is building and sustaining a robust talent management enterprise, establishing the Coast Guard as an employer of choice.

Talent Management is both our most pressing challenge and our greatest opportunity. Attracting, incentivizing, and retaining our best talent also requires us to think about our Coast Guard families. For instance, Congress recently authorized the military to reimburse professional relicensing costs for spouses. And, the Coast Guard is leading the six armed services in the number of spouses reimbursed!

But despite some successes, our workforce faces a lack of accessible and affordable childcare across the nation. To help our people, we partnered with the Navy to change our child care subsidy program.

Unfortunately, this transition created an enrollment backlog, slowing payments to our members. However, we've instituted multiple improvements and the Navy recently added staff to address this backlog. As of today, we have more than 1,600 children enrolled – that's nearly 500 more than under the previous program.

To lead operations in an uncertain future requires us to harness the full power of diverse backgrounds and original thinking. We must ALL build an inclusive culture that not only attracts the best of America's diverse population, but fosters an environment that encourages them to stay. A Coast Guard where every person understands that inclusion and diversity are mission imperatives, where every Coast Guardsman understands that these imperatives are only enhanced and strengthened through the foundations of strong leadership.

Leaders are found at every level in our Service. During Hurricane Dorian, you may have seen our aircrews and cutter crews on the news, but you didn't see the HERO IN THE HANGAR. A mission support expert who facilitated our whole-of-Coast Guard response in the wake of the deadly storm...

[SK2 Ford Video]

Our efforts must be focused on recruiting and retaining truly inspirational and talented people like Petty Officer Ford. This begins with a better understanding of why our people serve.

This past May, we launched a two-year holistic underrepresented minorities study, with preliminary results due this June. This study will provide valuable insight into how we can strengthen our Culture of Respect. An issue so important that I've extended the initial two year charter for the Personnel Readiness Task Force brought on board in 2018, so that we can accelerate the pace of change informed by the study's initial results.

But this is only one part of a greater plan. Next month we will launch a four-year Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan to provide leaders at every level with the skills to realize the full potential of our talented workforce.

In the year to come, you'll also see the roll-out of a workforce 2030 action plan to better position our Service to meet future personnel readiness needs.

I'm committed to applying knowledge learned in order to solve our greatest personnel problems now. For instance, the 2019 Women's Retention Study identified that our workforce lacks a centralized and accessible communication platform to get the information they need. That's why we are launching "MyCoastGuard" this June — a comprehensive mobile communications hub for our entire Coast Guard community.

Responding to feedback from the field, we have improved the Coast Guard's Meritorious Advancement Program. Now, for the first time in our history, every District Commander has the authority to select and meritoriously advance some of the most talented people in our Service.

This is one way we can honor an individual's embodiment of our core values. Similarly, we owe it to the cornerstone of what makes our Service great —our people— to memorialize the extraordinary achievements

of our past, present, and future workforce. And I look forward to showcasing the rich history and heroism of all Coast Guardsmen in the National Coast Guard Museum scheduled to open in New London, Connecticut in 2024.

Collectively, ALL of these talent management initiatives empower our people to pursue and achieve success and in the process, optimize Coast Guard mission excellence.

There is no better return on investment than the United States Coast Guard, and I am grateful for both the Administration's and the Congress' support for our new assets which provide unprecedented capability. Now, we need the matching resources to effectively operate and support the Coast Guard that the Nation has built. These investments are essential mission-enablers, ensuring our operational success today, and revolutionizing the way we conduct operations in the future.

Every day I am inspired, impressed, and humbled by OUR COASTIES who put the needs of the American public first. Men and women who lead during crisis, whether it's hurricane response, massive flooding, or a capsized vessel...

[AST2 Newberg, GOLDEN RAY Vignette]

Petty Officer Newberg is truly a hero.

The next generation of Coast Guard men and women NEED strong leaders coming up through the ranks, leaders who excel in the face of adversity and leaders who embody our Core Values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. Petty Officer Newberg, here in the audience, and Petty Officer Ford whom is watching in the Bahamas – PLEASE STAND.

In honor of our new meritorious advancement program, I hereby advance Petty Officer Emily Ford and Petty Officer Nathan Newberg to first class petty officers in the United States Coast Guard! Master Chief Vanderhaden, CDR Benson, present their new collar devices.

Our extraordinary men and women who truly live by our Core Values will never let you down. And our senior leadership team will ALWAYS have their backs because on our watch your Coast Guard must, and will, remain SEMPER PARATUS – ALWAYS READY... the American public expects no less!

History and experience show that our people enable the Coast Guard to adapt and overcome. This was true for Hamilton's Revenue Cutter Service, and is true today – to best serve the Nation, we must invest in our Service and empower our people.

We all serve for different reasons, but over my 36-plus year career I have found that we all share the same desire to take care of our shipmates, protect our families, and safeguard the American dream...

Ensuring our outstanding Coast Guard men and women can achieve these goals and grow as both individuals and professionals...THIS is why I serve! Thank you for joining me today and God Bless the United States of America. Semper Paratus!