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Adm. Papp optimistic about 'State of the Coast Guard'

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It was a question from a cadet at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy about sequestration, Adm. Robert J. Papp Jr. said Wednesday, that helped crystallize his thinking about the current fiscal realities and how they are affecting the service.

Papp, the commandant of the Coast Guard, explained the budget process to Hayley Smith, a freshman cadet, in Papp's annual leadership address at the academy in January, and told her this is the "worst fiscal mess" he has seen in his career.

Papp said Wednesday during his State of the Coast Guard Address that his answer really wasn't wrong, but it didn't get to the heart of her question.

"What she was really concerned about was the impact to our Coast Guard. As a fourth-class cadet, a freshman, she was concerned about the future of the organization," Papp said.

At Papp's invitation, Smith attended Wednesday's address at the National Defense University at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, D.C. Papp told the audience and the Coast Guardsmen across the country watching online that he is confident and optimistic about where the Coast Guard is today, and where the service is headed, because of the caliber of the men and women who serve in the organization.

"It's true that the challenges we face are real and like everyone in our government, we may be asked to do less with less, or at least do the same work but by different means," he said. "But there will be a place for her ... and for our Coast Guard, today, tomorrow and into the future as far as I can see."

Smith, who went to high school in New London, said after the speech that she shares Papp's optimism.

"We all know what the mission is. We know what we signed up for, and we're willing to carry that out as best as we can," she said. "And because we're willing to continue fighting for what the Coast Guard stands for, there will always be a future for the Coast Guard."

Smith added that she was surprised and honored to have been invited to the address.

"I feel I understand a little bit more now where he was coming from," she said. "He gets asked those questions about the fiscal cliff and the future of the Coast Guard all the time, and he's not worried about it. He has faith."

Papp also highlighted the Coast Guard's response to Hurricane Sandy and released his "Commandant's Situation Report" during the

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address. The report describes the progress made toward achieving the objectives he set forth shortly after becoming commandant in 2011 — steady the service, honor the profession, strengthen partnerships and respect one another — and the work that remains ahead.

Among a number of initiatives, the Coast Guard plans to establish a permanent National Incident Management Assist Team to prevent and respond to hazards incidents, and publish the first comprehensive Coast Guard Arctic Strategy in March.

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