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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF THE

MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD

CHARLES W. BOWEN

ON THE

COAST GUARD BUDGET AND AUTHORIZATION BILL FOR 2008

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 8, 2007

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today as the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard to voice my support and concerns for the men and women of our service. On behalf of the entire service, we are grateful to you and Congress for your support of the Coast Guard's fiscal year (FY) 2008 budget request and your genuine interest in ensuring the continued success of the United States Coast Guard.

Our Commandant, Admiral Thad Allen, is focused on mission execution, making sure the Coast Guard continues to successfully respond to all threats and all hazards. He is committed to ensuring that we build and sustain the most versatile workforce in government, that we are equipped with the most capable ships, aircraft and boats, the most effective systems to support them, and the training to operate them safely and efficiently. As his senior enlisted advisor, it is my role is to address those issues that directly affect all aspects of our members' daily lives.

As this Subcommittee is aware, 2006 was another extraordinary year in terms of mission performance for the Coast Guard. Every task we perform is in direct support of one of our five fundamental roles: maritime security, maritime safety, national defense, maritime mobility and protection of natural resources. The personnel performing our Coast Guard missions did so in demanding conditions beyond precedent. In the past eight months I have personally visited with thousands of Coast Guard men and women all over the country. Here are just a few highlights.

On the west coast I met a petty officer from USCGC MONSOON who led a boarding party, along with other federal drug agents, that resulted in the arrest of a major Mexican drug lord. Francisco Javier Arellano-Felix was a leader of an extremely violent gang, known as the "Tijuana Cartel," who was responsible for digging elaborate tunnels to smuggle drugs under the U.S. border. Other counter-drug boardings from Coast Guard and Navy, as well as Allied naval vessels in the Eastern Pacific and Caribbean, resulted in all-time records for seizures and arrests. We removed nearly 287,000 pounds, or 130-metric tons, of cocaine from the transit zone in fiscal year 2006, and over 338,000 pounds, or 153-metric tons, of cocaine in fiscal year 2005. In comparison, from 1993 to 2003, the interagency seized an average of 109,474 pounds, or about 50-metric tons, per year. To put it more powerfully, in the last two years alone, we removed twice as much cocaine as we cumulatively seized in all of the years from 1994 to 1998.

Petty Officer Steven Ruh of Coast Guard Station Oswego, New York demonstrated extraordinary bravery when he unhesitatingly swam 100 yards battling 8-10 foot seas and 30 knot winds, to rescue a seriously injured woman who had been swept into the waters of Lake Ontario during a thunderstorm. This young woman is alive today because of Petty Officer Ruh's determined and heroic actions. The Coast Guard responded to more than 28,000 calls for assistance and saved the lives of more than 5,200 mariners in distress.

Since 2002, six 110-foot patrol boats have been operating in the Persian Gulf conducting Maritime Interception Operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In addition to the patrol boats, Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia (PATFORSWA) serves as the supporting unit for numerous port security units, harbor defense commands, and law enforcement detachments deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism. In 2006 personnel assigned to PATFORSWA built a training facility in Umm Qasr, Iraq. The purpose of this facility is to train Iraqi security forces in vessel boarding procedures, close quarters battle techniques, and container inspections. The first group of Iraqi marines successfully completed the inaugural two-week Coast Guard taught course of training on October 21st, 2006.

Additionally, the Coast Guard provided escorts in and out of key U.S. ports and Naval Vessel Protection Zones during the loading/unloading of ships involved in the transport of military equipment to Iraqi and Afghanistan theaters.

In January 2006, shortly after commencing the U.S. Antarctic Program's re-supply effort to open a channel through the ice into McMurdo Station, the chartered Russian icebreaker *Krasin* suffered a major casualty when a blade on one of its three propellers was sheared off by thick ice. USCGC POLAR STAR deployed on extremely short notice to Antarctica to assist the *Krasin* and complete the critical re-supply effort.

In support of the Coast Guard's vital mission to protect the nation's living marine resources, USCGC WALNUT and a Coast Guard C-130 airplane observed a foreign fishing vessel fishing illegally inside the Howland/Baker Exclusive Economic Zone, about 1,700 miles south of Honolulu. The WALNUT seized the vessel and escorted it to Guam. The vessel had approximately 500 metric tons of illegally caught skipjack tuna worth about $350,000.

These are just a few of examples of the selfless dedication of the Coast Guard workforce. Now I would like shift the focus from operations to address a number of quality of life issues that are vital to the morale and well being of our members.

HOUSING

Housing remains a major concern for our workforce. Your continued support of annual Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) increases has positively impacted the vast majority of our personnel. Sufficient housing allowances permit our members to pursue housing within the local economy, which in turn reduces the need for Coast Guard owned housing. Of course, this only benefits those people who are assigned to areas that can support the Coast Guard demand for public housing. Due to the very nature of our missions, the Coast Guard requires its members to reside in remote and/or resort areas that may not have adequate housing to support our demand. This often forces service members to leave their families at other locations because of a lack of suitable housing. When there is a low vacancy rate for rental units in a given area, the Secretary of Homeland Security may designate these areas as Critical Housing Areas. This designation allows the Coast Guard to lease housing at costs greater than the authorized and appropriated BAH. Our service currently has 23 sites that meet the Critical Housing Area eligibility criteria, almost half of which are along the Gulf Coast, where the housing inventory is still struggling to recover from the devastation of Hurricane's Katrina and Rita.

The state of Coast Guard owned housing is of particular concern to me. Although the vast majority of our personnel reside in private sector housing, there are some locations where housing is insufficient to meet our requirements, and it is necessary for the Coast Guard to provide quarters. Currently, the Coast Guard owns approximately 4,400 family houses and 227 unaccompanied personnel housing facilities. The average age of Coast Guard housing is over 40 years, and requires significant improvement. The Coast Guard faces many challenges to address its shore infrastructure maintenance and recapitalization programs. This has a direct impact on the health, safety and morale of our service members and their families. Examples of our deteriorating inventory include 200 family homes in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and our largest 200 room unaccompanied personnel housing facility located in Staten Island, New York, both of which have been declared inadequate by the Coast Guard's Director of Personnel Management

This is clearly a situation that will decline without continued investment and development of alternative programs to ensure acceptable housing for the men and women of the Coast Guard.

CHILD CARE

Available, affordable and accessible childcare is a very important quality of life issue for Coast Guard personnel. Our mission requirements often find our members in remote assignments with no access to Department of Defense (DoD) or Coast Guard sponsored child development centers. The exceptionally high cost of childcare in remote areas is a serious concern. The principal obstacle that prevents our pursuit of traditional child care alternatives for our people in remote areas is the lack of shore infrastructure in and around our assignment areas that are typically void of DoD resources. The Coast Guard child care system supports a much smaller percentage of Coast Guard children than the DoD childcare system. In July 2006, a positive step was taken when the Coast Guard established a partnership with the General Services Administration (GSA) to make child care more affordable for our families. This partnership was created to assist members in locating state licensed center-based or home-based child care facilities. In addition, a tuition assistance program providing up to 4,500 dollars per child per year became available to qualifying personnel for child care services received at commercial child care facilities nationwide. From July 2006 to the present, over 600 additional children have been enrolled in the child care subsidy program, and 550 Coast Guard families have received child care subsidy benefits. As of December 31, 2006, 1,906 Coast Guard children were enrolled in Coast Guard-sponsored child care services; this represents a significant increase to over 8 percent from 3 percent in FY 2004. *While this is great step forward, by comparison, approximately 14 percent of DoD children under 12 are enrolled in some form of child care (sponsored/subsidized by DoD*

HEALTHCARE

While a majority of our fellow armed services personnel are assigned to large bases with accompanying support services, the Coast Guard, by virtue of its unique mission set, must assign personnel to geographically remote locations. A majority of them are located more than fifty miles from the nearest DoD Military Treatment Facility (MTF). These members and their families must rely upon the DoD TRICARE provider network, or in the case of approximately 50 percent of Coast Guard members, TRICARE Prime Remote. This means that not only is there no MTF nearby, but there is often no established TRICARE network. The Department of Defense (DoD) TRICARE managers continue to grow the provider network, strengthening the value and quality of this benefit. As with any large health care system, local concerns are occasionally raised by members and some providers. Travel and transportation costs associated with obtaining health care are also problematic. DoD and TRICARE managers are aware of these issues and are working to address them. We have made significant progress with TRICARE over the past few years and with your continued support we will ensure that this positive trend continues.

INTEGRATED DEEPWATER SYSTEM

During the past several weeks there have been several Congressional hearings regarding the Deepwater acquisition. Rather than repeat what has already been said, I would like to recount a story from my own experience that dramatizes what I believe is the true significance of Deepwater and its importance to the Coast Guard and our country. Several years ago I was serving as the Officer in Charge of the USCGC POINT TURNER based out of Newport, Rhode Island. The POINT TURNER was an 82-foot patrol

boat with a crew of ten. One winter night, we were returning home from a particularly rough patrol when we received a call from the District One Command Center in Boston stating that a large fishing vessel was disabled and adrift, 120 miles off the coast. The wind was blowing about 45 miles per hour and the sea conditions were already approaching 15 feet, so I knew that it would be a very difficult case. I checked the weather and noted that a low pressure area was making its way up the coast, and would probably be right between the POINT TURNER and shore about the time that we reached the disabled vessel. Winds were expected to strengthen to 70 miles an hour. My crew and I assessed the risk and came to the conclusion that a larger vessel was needed to safely complete the mission. I called the Command Center and asked if a larger cutter was available. District One dispatched an aging medium endurance cutter that completed the case safely, but sustained significant damage while doing so. This was a search and rescue case… lives were in danger and it was critical that the Coast Guard had the capability to reach them safely in an offshore environment. Our present offshore fleet cannot be sustained indefinitely. This case was about saving lives, but there are many other reasons that the Coast Guard must be able to project an offshore presence. Threats, ranging from illegal immigration to the potential of a waterborne weapon of mass destruction, dictate that the further the Coast Guard can push our borders out and deal with a problem away from our shores, the better.

The Deepwater Program realized a major dividend last November 11th when the Coast Guard christened its first new high endurance cutter in more than 35 years. I have personally toured the USCGC BERTHOLF and believe that this new class of ships will more than meet the Coast Guard's multi-mission responsibilities in homeland security, national defense, marine safety and environmental protection. The livability on this cutter will be nothing like our Coast Guard crews have ever experienced. Six-person staterooms, a state of the art dining facility and an onboard gym are just a few of the features that will increase quality of life for our crews. Advanced integrated electronics and other features such as an onboard SCIF will allow enhanced interoperability with the Navy.

On December 21, 2006, the Coast Guard achieved another milestone in the Deepwater Program when the first C-144A arrived at Air Station Elizabeth City, NC, from the CASA factory in Sevillc, Spain.

Bottom line: Deepwater is a crucial component to the continued success of the Coast Guard’s mission – All Threats, All Hazards, Always Ready!

RECRUITING

Our missions – saving lives, enforcing the law, protecting the environment and keeping a vigilant watch – attracts bright, talented young people. We have over 370 dedicated individuals assigned to our recruiting offices every day. The success of our missions begins here.

FY 2006 was an impressive year for not only meeting our active duty recruiting targets with highly qualified recruits, but we continued to excel at diversifying our workforce. We achieved the highest percentage of active duty minority accessions (39.3 percent) and the third highest percentage of female active duty accessions (16.9 percent) in the history of the Coast Guard. Both numbers were a significant increase from FY 2005. Recruiting is one of the most demanding and rewarding jobs we ask our people to do and our recruiters are more than meeting this challenge to make our Coast Guard the best it can be by finding the best candidates so that we can be Ready Today – Preparing for Tomorrow.

RETENTION

Not only are we recruiting a quality workforce, but more importantly we are retaining a quality workforce. The current retention rates within our officer and enlisted communities are 93 percent and 88.5 percent, respectively. Our recruiters are finding and employing high quality people and our service is rapidly becoming a "service of choice" for young America and an "employer of choice" for those considering making the Coast Guard a career.

As a public service organization, it is essential that we retain a diverse, quality workforce that reflects the changing face of our country. ADM Allen has brought a new energy to the Coast Guard, and I fully expect that this energy will continue to fuel our retention rates.

LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

It is essential to the professional growth of our enlisted force that we that provide the right kind of leadership training at the proper accession points to develop the leaders we need for the future. Our leadership framework is based on 28 leadership competencies including knowledge, skills and expertise; they are the keys to career success. Developing these skills in all Coast Guard personnel will result in the continuous improvement necessary for us to remain ready for all threats and all hazards.

The Coast Guard is fully committed to the personal and professional growth of all of our people. Since learning and development occur primarily at a member's permanently assigned unit, commanding officers are ultimately accountable for providing their workforce with developmental activities, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring timely coaching. To meet these needs, the Coast Guard implemented the Individual Development Plan. The Individual Development Plan helps commanding officers meet these responsibilities by emphasizing discussions and joint decisions by personnel and their supervisors. The Individual Development Plan actively encourages the individual to think about their current position and future potential, and prompts activities to build the expertise, confidence and self-esteem to lead to a successful, fulfilling career.

Field input at all levels continues to demand a solution to close the gap in leadership training for our first line supervisors. Our quickly advancing junior personnel are empowered with assuming positions of greater responsibility without formal instruction of basic leadership tools early in their careers. Our Leadership and Advisory Committee, in alignment with our Leadership Framework and Enlisted Professional Military Education program, sees Leadership and Management training as essential for our petty officers and seeks a performance based requirement for Leadership and Management training prior to advancement to Petty Officer First Class. Successful completion of the Leadership and Management training will soon be a pay grade based requirement for advancement eligibility within the enlisted workforce, and Leadership and Management training expansion will continue this year.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for all that you do for the men and women of the Coast Guard. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.