

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee.

I have prepared a written statement that has been submitted for the record.

On behalf of the over 49,000 men and women who make up the Active and Reserve components of the U.S. Coast Guard, I would like to thank Congress for their support, and continued efforts to help us position America's Coast Guard to be ready to answer the call and execute the mission.

The events of the last few years have forced us - ALL of us - to become more vigilant. Every minute of every day members of our service are on watch, 7X24, somewhere on the globe. To stand these watches, to man the boats, ships, and aircraft necessary to execute the mission, to be able to respond to All Threats, All Hazards, in all environments, We must focus on our People.

2007 was another exceptional year for the U.S. Coast Guard. The personnel performing our Coast Guard missions did so in demanding conditions beyond precedent. Our men and women performed with courage, sacrifice, and dignity. Over the course of the last year I have personally visited

thousands of Coast Guardsmen all over the world and know first-hand what they do.

In the frigid waters off Alaska, Petty Officer Wil Milam rescued 4 terrified survivors despite a rupture to his drysuit that allowed freezing water to threaten his own life.

Master Chief Mike Leavitt survived the full brunt of a 20 foot ocean wave that tore a full-face helmet completely off his head..but still managed to complete the rescue of a man who had been swept off of a jetty in Humboldt Bay, California.

Petty Officer James Huddleston, miraculously escaped injury, when the military base in Iraq where he was located suffered a mortar attack, but as soon as the attack was over immediately sprang into action to render aid and comfort to his fellow warriors.

Everyone has a role, whether through mission support or mission execution it is our people who rise to meet every challenge. The challenges include our aging infrastructure, including aging cutters and housing. These are quality of life issues that affect the morale and well being of every member of the service.

The U. S. Coast Guard is operating a fleet of ships that is on average extremely old. We have people assigned to 40 year old ships that still have 30 man berthing areas. Our crews live aboard these ships at least 185 days every year - or in other words - for every year that they are assigned to these cutters they spend over half their life onboard. From a quality of life perspective, living areas onboard these ships must be maintained at least to the standard to which it was built. As these cutters age, this is becoming more and more of a challenge and will require additional funding to accomplish.

Family Housing is an important issue for our members and their families. Providing safe, suitable, and affordable housing directly impacts our mission readiness. Inattention to our family and unaccompanied housing units will ultimately lead to health, safety and morale concerns that are unacceptable to our members and their families.

At almost every "all-hands" meeting I hold at units, someone asks me about transferring their Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits to their family. If this benefit could be transferred to spouses and children it would be considered a huge step forward for our families welfare. In addition, like all military spouses, the unemployment rate of Coast Guard spouses is higher than the general population. Frequent Permanent Change of Station moves often prevent

laying down the community roots necessary to obtain good jobs. A federal government hiring preference would be a great step forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and thank you for all that you do for the men and women of the USCG. I look forward to answering any questions that you might have.