

News From \_\_\_\_\_

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**Opening Statement**  
**SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD (D-W.Va.)**  
**Chairman**  
**Senate Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee**

**FY 2011 Budget Request for United States Coast Guard**

Today, I welcome the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Thad Allen, to discuss the Fiscal Year 2011 budget request for the Coast Guard. In May, the Commandant will conclude his four-year term as the highest ranking member of the Coast Guard. He has served this Nation with distinction.

The importance of our Coast Guard cannot be overstated. It is the fifth branch of the military and is responsible for the safety and security of our maritime interests in U.S. ports, waterways, and on the high-seas. The Coast Guard is also a critical first responder to natural disasters. While the nation watched, the Coast Guard rescued over 33,000 people in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This January, the Coast Guard was the first on the scene to evacuate over 1,000 U.S. citizens from Haiti following the most devastating earthquake to strike that country.

The Commandant of the Coast Guard has made significant organizational changes intended to improve Coast Guard business practices. In addition, the Commandant has made several changes to improve the management of "Deepwater", the Coast Guard's acquisition program intended to modernize its fleet of ships and planes. These changes, along with legislation that this Subcommittee initiated in the Fiscal Year 2007 Supplemental Appropriations Act, have stabilized this previously troubled acquisition program.

Despite these improvements, the Coast Guard is challenged with aging assets, a fragile infrastructure, and workforce shortfalls. That is why the cuts proposed in the Fiscal Year 2011 budget are so puzzling to me.

The President's budget request for the Coast Guard would cut discretionary funding by \$71 million and reduce military strength by 1,112 billets. The Coast Guard is the only branch of the military to experience a personnel decrease in the President's budget proposal. In addition, funding for acquisitions would be cut by 10 percent.

The President's request does include important funding for critical acquisitions such as the fifth National Security Cutter and four Fast Response Cutters. However, these proposals are overshadowed by plans to decommission five Maritime Safety and Security Teams, four High Endurance Cutters, one Medium Endurance Cutter, four fixed wing aircraft, and five HH-65 helicopters. I am troubled that at the same time that the Coast Guard faces significant asset gaps in meeting existing mission requirements, the Office of Management and Budget is proposing to decommission existing assets before new assets come on line to replace them.

Such reductions raise serious concerns to this Chairman. The Coast Guard budget appears to be driven by a budget topline rather than by the need to effectively address the Coast Guard's mission requirements.

Will the Coast Guard be able to maintain current capability to secure our ports, intercept illegal migrants, interdict drug smugglers, and save lives with this proposed funding plan? Sadly, the answer is no, putting our citizens, who depend on the Coast Guard, at risk.

Admiral Allen, before you begin, I want to recognize the wonderful and hard working employees of the Coast Guard Operations System Center, the National Vessel Documentation Center, and the National Maritime Center, all of which are in West Virginia. These West Virginians are proud to support the Coast Guard's many missions.

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