



## COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Hearing Statement of Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee Chairman Lou Correa (D-CA)

#### *Examining the President's FY 2020 Budget Request for the Transportation Security Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard*

April 9, 2019

It is often said that budget proposals are a reflection of priorities. If so, this budget proposal confirms that the President's priorities are sorely misguided and, in fact, dangerous. The proposal reflects an ignorance of the threats facing the homeland and how to secure against them, as it places funding for a border wall above all else.

Take, for example, the TSA. The TSA faces a complex threat picture and constant resource challenges. We have seen in recent years how growing passenger volumes threaten to outpace TSA's ability to securely screen passengers, as long wait times have at times thrown the aviation system into chaos. And, TSA has struggled to address persistent morale and attrition problems, due in part to staffing shortages. The recent government shutdown highlighted to the American public that many TSA officers live paycheck to paycheck.

In the face of these challenges, the President has proposed cutting TSA's frontline staffing by 815 full-time positions and 50 canine teams when compared with currently enacted levels. He also proposes placing additional burdens on the aviation industry by eliminating critical security programs such as the Law Enforcement Officer Reimbursement Program and TSA's staffing of exit lanes, as well as cutting support for programs like the "VIPR" Program and the Transit Security Grant Program that help protect vulnerable surface transportation systems. This is no way to fund a national security agency. Let me be clear: the TSA would struggle to operate under these cuts, and the American people would be left vulnerable to attacks.

As for the Coast Guard the proposal is not much better. Like the TSA, the Coast Guard faces constant resource challenges as it executes its multifaceted mission. For years, we have asked the Coast Guard to do more with less, and though they have always risen to the challenge, no organization can be sustained indefinitely by insufficient funding. Our long-term failure to invest sufficiently in fleet recapitalization has begun to affect the Coast Guard's mission readiness. If we do not invest in the construction and maintenance of critical assets and infrastructure now, the Coast Guard's operational capabilities will be reduced at a time when they are sorely needed. Unfortunately, the President's budget fails to make the investments needed.

Although the budget proposes several investments in new cutters and aircraft, it does not include sufficient funding for long-lead time materials to keep the Coast Guard's Polar Security Cutter plans on track. It also does not provide enough funding to upgrade Coast Guard helicopter assets. Strikingly, the President proposes zero funding to begin reducing the Coast Guard's \$2.6 billion backlog of shore infrastructure maintenance and recapitalization projects. The Coast Guard will need to scale back its operations as it is forced to decommission assets without replacements online.

Already, the Coast Guard estimates that it is aware of 80 percent of the targets of interest moving in the maritime environment—including movements of migrants and illegal drugs—but is only able to target approximately 20 percent for interdiction due to resource constraints. Despite those constraints, last year the Coast Guard seized more tons of cocaine and detained more suspected smugglers than all other federal agencies combined. If the President truly wants to keep drugs from coming across our borders, he should fully fund the Coast Guard.

Instead, the President insists on prioritizing his ineffective border wall above all else—including the security of the American people. Instead of having Mexico pay for the wall, the President proposes cutting over a billion dollars from the TSA and Coast Guard budgets to pay for the wall. This budget proposal is dead on arrival, since Congress will not entertain these cuts.

Again, I would like to thank the TSA officers who serve as our frontline to secure aviation; the Federal Air Marshals who serve as our last line of defense; and the men and women of the Coast Guard, who protect American interests at home and across the globe. Despite difficult circumstances and missing paychecks, these patriots have continued to put the mission first, and I thank them for their service.

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