



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Taking the Helm: The Commandant's Vision for the U.S. Coast Guard

July 14, 2022

Admiral Fagan, I would like to echo my colleagues' congratulations on your more than three decades of service leading up to becoming our Nation's first female service chief. What you have achieved to this point is evidence of your unwavering service to our country and the men and women of the Coast Guard. As you have come up through the ranks, you have undoubtedly experienced the enormous challenges facing the Coast Guard – challenges you will now lead the service through as Commandant.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, unprecedented cybersecurity threats to the Marine Transportation System, and accelerating climate change mean that the Coast Guard's ability to adapt to dynamic circumstances is more important than ever. To respond to emerging threats and the increased demand for its services, the Coast Guard is undergoing a massive effort to recapitalize its aging fleet.

I was pleased that the Fiscal Year 2023 budget request includes proposals for continued investments in new cutters, including National Security Cutters and Polar Security Cutters built in my home state of Mississippi. Beyond investing in vessels, aircraft, and infrastructure, this moment must be a turning point for investing in the Coast Guard's people. I have longstanding concerns about diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Coast Guard, as well as the Service's treatment of whistleblowers and failure to hold offenders accountable.

I am pleased that the Coast Guard has increased the number of women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ community in its ranks, but more work remains to be done. The Service has major problems retaining and advancing these individuals due to deep-seated cultural issues and policies in dire need of improvement. The Committee on Homeland Security has heard from many whistleblowers in recent years who have sounded the alarm about rampant discrimination, sexual assault, and retaliation that erode the Coast Guard's cohesion and mission readiness.

Admiral, at your nomination hearing in April, you stated that you will prioritize building a diverse, welcoming Coast Guard that gives members "a strong sense of belonging, so every individual is valued, safe, and able to deliver their best service to the Nation." I am grateful to you for making that commitment—and I fully intend to hold you to it. I look forward to hearing today about your plans to ensure that our United States Coast Guard lives up to its reputation as the best in the world. I congratulate you again on your confirmation, and I thank you for your service to our Nation.

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