



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Ranking Member Shri Thanedar (D-MI)

Building the Fleet: Assessing the Department of Homeland Security's Role in the United States Coast Guard's Acquisitions Process

May 7, 2024

The Coast Guard's shipbuilding efforts and other acquisition programs play a critical role in protecting U.S. national security. The Coast Guard has an aging fleet of surface and aviation vessels. In the Arctic, the Coast Guard is challenged to maintain an adequate presence due to a lack of modern icebreakers.

The Coast Guard's two existing icebreakers, the Polar Star and the Healy, are operating well past their service lives and are not sufficient on their own to meet the Coast Guard's needs. In the Indo-Pacific, the Red Sea, and elsewhere around the globe, the Coast Guard's aging assets are similarly stretched thin by increased demands.

The Coast Guard is undergoing a historic recapitalization of its fleet, working to acquire modern vessels that will enhance capabilities and mission readiness. This large-scale, complex effort will take long-term investment and commitment from those of us in Congress, as well as the consistent support and oversight of the Department of Homeland Security.

Already, the Coast Guard has successfully acquired and deployed a large number of new cutters through the National Security Cutter and Fast Response Cutter programs. However, the service has faced significant challenges in developing, designing, and building new icebreakers through the Polar Security Cutter program, as well as new multi-mission cutters through the Offshore Patrol Cutter program.

These programs have faced a host of challenges, including a global pandemic, supply chain disruptions, natural disasters, contractor inexperience, and a strong labor market which is driving increased labor costs. As a result, both programs have seen significant delays and cost increases. Some of these challenges could not have been predicted, while others likely should have been better accounted for within calculated risk assumptions.

Going forward, DHS and the Coast Guard must work together with partners in the U.S. Navy and the shipbuilding industry to build up an industrial base capable of regularly producing world-class cutters and other vessels according to predictable schedules and budgets. These efforts will be critical to not just the success of the Polar Security Cutter and Offshore Patrol Cutter programs, but to building Great Lakes icebreakers, Waterways Commerce Cutters, Arctic Security Cutters, and other cutters not yet envisioned.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how we can learn lessons from the past few years to improve Coast Guard acquisition programs and ensure effective DHS oversight.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978