

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

**Prepared Statement in Support of Amendment for Consideration of
H.R. 2838 - Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2011**

U.S. Coast Guard Academy Nominations

November 4, 2011

My amendment would allow Members of Congress to nominate qualified candidates for admission to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. Located in New London, Connecticut, the Coast Guard Academy is one of the five prestigious U.S. service academies. The others are: the Military Academy in West Point, New York, the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the Merchant Marine Academy in King's Point, New York.

These service academies provide 4-year undergraduate educations, on a tuition-free basis, to help mold talented young people into this nation's future leaders. Upon graduation, service academy cadets become commissioned officers in active or reserve components of the military, the merchant marines, or the U.S. Coast Guard.

Under current law, Members of Congress are authorized to nominate candidates to all U.S. service academies except the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. The Coast Guard Academy uses an admissions process similar to the processes used at traditional civilian colleges and universities. On average, the Coast Guard accepts almost 400 applicants each academic year. Of these 400 applicants, a disproportionate number hail from states that border the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The rest of the country is largely underrepresented. My amendment seeks to foster greater geographic diversity in the Coast Guard Academy's applicant pool by allowing each Member of Congress to nominate up to three qualified candidates.

Similar language that I authored with the gentleman from Maryland, Representative Cummings, was accepted, by voice vote, during consideration of the 2010 Coast Guard Authorization bill. I want to recognize Representative Cummings as a cosponsor of my amendment and a true partner in this effort.

Under my amendment, for academic year 2013, the Coast Guard would be required to allocate a quarter of the slots in the incoming class to qualified candidates submitted through the congressional nominations process. In subsequent academic years, half of the slots would be filled through the congressional nominations process.

My amendment does not require the Coast Guard to alter or lower its selection criteria. To the contrary, it anticipates that the Coast Guard will utilize its criteria to select the best candidates from the pool of Member-nominated candidates to fill half of the slots in the incoming class, just as it will do to fill the remaining slots in the other half of the class. Additionally, my amendment does not require the Coast Guard to increase class sizes. That's a decision for the Coast Guard.

At its essence, it seeks to ensure that the Coast Guard attracts the best candidates from all over the country by increasing the applicant pool. Each of us has experienced the disappointment of having a talented young person that we nominated to one of the four other service academies be rejected. We all understand that it is a very competitive process and slots are scarce. I, for one, would welcome the opportunity to bring that person to attention of the Coast Guard Academy and help put him or her on a path to accomplishing much for themselves, their families, and the nation.