

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Floor Speech on the Confirmation of Admiral Linda Fagan to be U.S. Coast Guard

Commandant

May 11, 2022

CANTWELL: I also, Mr. President, want to speak about the historical significance of another nominee that will be voted on shortly, that is tonight. Hopefully in the wrap up, we will be passing on the nomination of Admiral Linda Fagan to be the next Commandant of the United States Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard serves the American people for safeguarding life at sea, protecting the environment, and ensuring our national security. The role Commandant is to lead the Coast Guard's approximately 55,000 active duty reserve and civilian workers, and approximately 26,000 volunteers in the execution of the Coast Guard's 11 different missions. From managing vessel traffic, to tackling drug smugglers, to saving lives in rough seas, to protecting endangered marine life, no military service does more with fewer resources.

And yet the Coast Guard's mission is only growing. The Coast Guard faces unprecedented environmental and geopolitical challenges due to the increasing threat of climate change. Men and women of the Coast Guard must respond to frequent and increasing severe extreme weather disasters.

The Arctic, where melting ice sheets provide new opportunities for shipping, tourism, and transportation. It's very important that the coast guard play a major role in making sure that we know how and have the capacity for the United States to lead in icebreaking capacity through the Arctic.

Admiral Fagan assumed the role of Vice Commandant in June of 2021 and she led the largest modernization and shipbuilding effort of the Coast Guard fleet since World War II. But I want people from the Northwest to know she started her career on the Polar Star, a 399 foot icebreaker homeported in Seattle. And during her career, she served on all seven continents.

She has held numerous leadership positions, including more than 15 years as a Marine Inspector and Commander for Sector New York, Commander for Coast Guard District 1, where she led all Coast Guard operations in New England, and Commander of the Pacific Area in charge of Coast Guard operations across the entire Pacific.

And she has an impressive science background, a bachelor's degree in Marine Science from the Coast Guard Academy and two Masters Degrees, one of which is from the University of Washington in Marine Affairs.

In addition to her extraordinary qualifications, Admiral Fagan will be the first woman and mother to lead the Coast Guard. She will also be the first woman to lead any branch of our Armed Services.

Now more than ever, we must have a strong tested leader as Commandant. It is clear from her record that Admiral Fagan is the right woman for the job. I look forward to working with her to ensure that the men and women in the Coast Guard have the tools they need to execute their mission and support their families.

And it means continuing to make investments on shore infrastructure, aircraft, and as I mentioned earlier, our Polar Icebreakers. But just as we have fought hard to work with the Coast Guard on their people, it's time to work with Commandant Fagan to continue the hard work to expand paid family leave policies, to improve access to child care, to champion efforts to retain women and underrepresented minorities serving in the Coast Guard.

Recently, we helped secure \$429 million for Coast Guard infrastructure in the Infrastructure Bill. And \$120 million of that investment will go to construction of on-site childcare facilities. As a working mother and [having] working daughters [serving] in the Coast Guard, Admiral Fagan knows the realities of a Coast Guard family.

She knows that with 40% of the Coast Guard being women that we need to have good policies that will continue to encourage them to stay in the Coast Guard and move up in leadership just as she's done. I know under her, we will build world class, state of the art facilities to help all our Coasties and all our coast families. And I know that we'll continue to be proud of the mission of the Coast Guard and continuing to have those many, many challenges that they help us deal with every single day.

But tonight we're doing more than just helping. We are confirming Admiral Fagan, we are sending a strong message to women serving in the Coast Guard. We're sending a strong message to women Cadets at Academy and to training people at Cape May.

And we are sending a strong message to young girls who dream of someday serving in the Coast Guard. We are saying now that the leader of this organization that your service matters, your contribution to the Coast Guard and to the country matters. And yes, you too can be Commandant someday.

I want to thank Admiral Fagan for her tremendous service and I thank my colleagues for joining me tonight to vote to confirm Admiral Linda Fagan to be Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard.