

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2016

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Shaheen:

We are writing to request additional support for the United States Coast Guard in Fiscal Year 2017. The Coast Guard is our nation's premier maritime agency and multi-missioned armed service, yet it has struggled to meet current and emerging mission requirements under unrealistic budget constraints. The Coast Guard's budget has been in steady decline, which has affected not only the execution of the Coast Guard's missions, but has also prevented the Coast Guard from making critical investments in aging assets and infrastructure. We have concerns that the Coast Guard's shrinking acquisition and operations budgets will limit the growth and performance of the service.

The Coast Guard is a lean service with 41,000 active duty members supporting 11 statutory missions worldwide. In 2014, the Coast Guard saved more than 3,500 lives, conducted 8,600 port security boardings, 72 Department of Defense directed intercept missions, and prevented \$4.9 billion of illegal drugs from entering the United States. Our Nation faces a growing range of complex maritime challenges, such as increased threat of transnational organized crime networks, globalization, and advances in technology, which all pose new threats to maritime security. For years, the administration's budget request demonstrated poor support of Coast Guard acquisitions and asset recapitalization. Between 2010 and 2015, the acquisition budget decreased by 40%. Last year, Congress restored funding for acquisitions, but we have a long way to go. The Coast Guard acquisition budget continues to constrain needed investments in key acquisition programs, including recapitalizing polar icebreakers, offshore patrol cutters and fast response cutters.

There is an urgent need to invest in the future of our nation's polar icebreaking. We support the President's request to accelerate the acquisition of a new polar ice breaker. In the interim, it is critical to extend the service life of the Coast Guard's idle heavy icebreaker, the *Polar Sea*. The United States is facing a six-year gap in heavy icebreaking capability between when the *Polar Star* retires and when a new heavy icebreaker will be commissioned. Many studies have been done to determine the best way to prevent this gap, and one commonsense solution stands out — extend the service life of the *Polar Sea* by 7-10 years. The United States cannot stand by, vulnerable, as we wait to build our own icebreaking fleet over the next decade. Refurbishing the

Polar Sea sends a message to the world that our national priority is to keep the Polar regions secure while we invest and recapitalize.

Additionally, funding in this year's budget does not provide for the full cost of the structural enhancement dry dock availability for two National Security Cutters – *Bertholf* and *Waesche*. In the last two fiscal years, the Coast Guard was appropriated \$38 million for the contract, which was recently determined to cost upwards of \$70.6 million. We request that the FY 2017 appropriations legislation include funds to cover these needed modifications for these critical assets.

Another area of great concern is the increased demand to address the vulnerabilities in the Gulf of Mexico, the Florida Straits and Caribbean. With the Navy retiring all of their Oliver Hazard Class Frigates (FFGs) last year, there are fewer ships available to patrol the waters near the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico to support the requirement of U.S. Southern Command, and to counter illicit trafficking of narcotics, weapons, cash and people. A dramatic increase in the interdiction of migrants has also placed a resource strain on the Coast Guard. This is evidenced by a 196% increase in migrant apprehensions from the first quarter of FY 2014 to the same time period of FY 2016. In summary, the Coast Guard is expected to cover more area and maintain an enduring presence in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific while doing traditional missions in the Gulf of Mexico and closer to home with less resources.

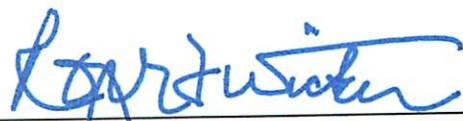
Driven by Presidential directives and national military and maritime strategies, over the past two years, the Coast Guard has published its Arctic, Western Hemisphere, and cyber strategies. Unfortunately, with a stagnant operating budget, the growing mission requirements resulting from these strategies force the Coast Guard to make significant trade-offs in its operations. These trade-offs occur at the expense of training personnel, growing the personnel force needed to adequately support these strategies, as well as investing appropriately to operate and maintain assets.

Despite the demands on the Coast Guard, its budget has not kept pace with the Service's expanding mission requirements. Limiting the Coast Guard's budget affects the Coast Guard's overall ability to maintain maritime presence, respond to individual and national emergencies, and protect our nation's economic and environmental interests. While we are acutely aware of the budget crisis facing our Nation, we believe that the men and women serving in the Coast Guard deserve operational assets, stable infrastructure, and the tools they need to meet expanded and emerging missions into the future.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



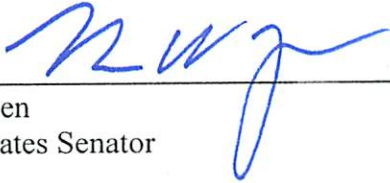
Roger Wicker
United States Senator



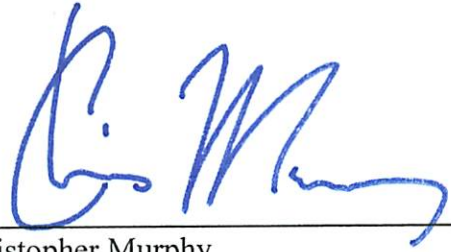
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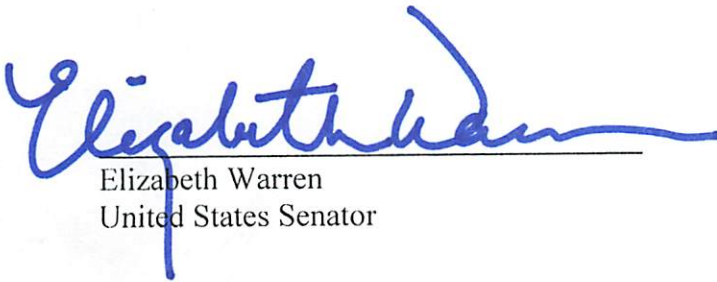
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United States Senator



Ron Wyden
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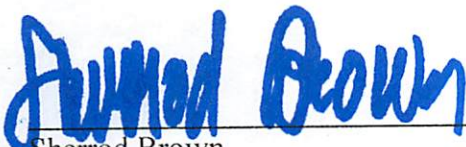
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