

**Chairman Shelley Moore Capito Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security**

Hearing to Review the FY2020 Budget Request for the U.S. Coast Guard

March 28, 2019

(As prepared for delivery)

Welcome everyone. I call this hearing of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security to order. This is the Subcommittee's first hearing of the Fiscal Year 2020 budget cycle, and we are reviewing the budget request for the Coast Guard.

I want to thank the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Karl Schultz, for agreeing to appear before our Subcommittee today. He is an outstanding leader and the top military officer of one of the five armed services of the United States. I have had the opportunity to join Admiral Shultz to review Coast Guard activities around the country and at critical Coast Guard facilities in West Virginia. I am sure his insights will help our Subcommittee better understand how the Coast Guard's budget request would support its many missions—from ensuring the safe navigation of waterways; to pollution control; to defending the United States' maritime borders. This is the first time Admiral Schultz is appearing before our Subcommittee, and we look forward to hearing from him.

I am also very pleased to be joined by our Ranking Member Senator Tester. We are excited to hold our first Fiscal Year 2020 hearing after an interesting 2019 cycle, and I think I speak for both of us when I say that we look forward to continuing our work together.

Last year, we worked hard to make sure necessary funds were appropriated to the Coast Guard to construct the first new heavy icebreaker built by the United States in more than 40 years. We also continued a historic recapitalization of the Coast Guard overall, and we look forward to working together with Admiral Schultz to recommend funding to support and make use of those investments.

Senator Tester and I are both from landlocked states, but we recognize how important the Coast Guard is to our national security.

The Coast Guard's maritime law enforcement activities—including significant interdiction of illegal traffic in the source and transit zones of the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific—may take place far away from our shores, but those efforts prevent dangerous drugs from making their way into West Virginia and Montana communities. While much of the nation's attention has been appropriately focused on the southwest land border, we'll hear today about the importance of the Coast Guard's role in protecting our maritime borders and keeping us safe.

Last year alone, the Coast Guard seized over 200 metric tons—yes, tons—of cocaine on the high seas, and they’ve already seized 56 tons so far this fiscal year.

In recent months, the Coast Guard has been on the minds of many Americans for two other reasons — one good, and one not so good.

During the last hurricane season, which was so devastating to so many American communities, I was so proud that the world was able to see the work of the Coast Guard—on every major news network—saving the lives of those impacted by the devastation. We know that the Coast Guard saves lives every day, but last year, the men and women of the Coast Guard saved nearly 4,000 lives—including 992 during hurricane response efforts. Our Maritime Safety Unit near Huntington, West Virginia is one of the brave units that stands ready to load up their trucks and haul their boats wherever Americans are in need of help when disaster strikes.

Unfortunately, the second reason the Coast Guard has been on people’s minds recently was the unnecessary 35-day government shutdown. Coast Guard men and women went without pay during this time while continuing to serve and perform their critical missions—in many cases away from their families. These folks were often serving alongside their partners in the other branches of the military who were getting paid. I am hoping that this year we can work together in a bipartisan fashion and through regular order to enact the Homeland Security Appropriations bill on time. Our appropriations bill is the best “Pay Our Coast Guard Act” out there. But regardless of what happens, I’m committed to making sure the men and women of the Coast Guard are treated fairly—no matter what twists and turns the appropriations process may take.

The Fiscal Year 2020 budget request we are reviewing today is a good starting point for our Subcommittee to begin determining how we can best support the men and women of the Coast Guard—, including more than 42,000 active duty, 6,000 reserve, and nearly 8,500 civilian staff—in the coming year.

Admiral Shultz — I look forward to working with you and your team to determine whether further adjustments are required to ensure the Coast Guard has what it needs to be successful in its many missions. We appreciate your testimony and your willingness to be the first out of the gate for the Department to answer questions from members of this Subcommittee.

I will now turn to our distinguished Ranking Member, Senator Tester [, then to our full committee Chairman, Senator Shelby][, and then to our full Committee Vice Chairman, Senator Leahy] for any opening remarks [he/they] may have before asking our witness to proceed with his testimony.

Then, we will allow each Senator, in order of arrival, seven minutes for any statements or questions they may have.

Thank you. Senator Tester.

###