

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 8, 2017

Mr. John M. Mulvaney
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Mulvaney:

Reports have surfaced that there is a proposed \$1.3 billion reduction to the United States Coast Guard's Fiscal Year 2018 Presidential budget request. We strongly urge you to refrain from any such cuts. The Coast Guard budget has suffered a steady decline since 2010, which resulted in negative impacts to Coast Guard missions, infrastructure, delays in necessary recapitalization efforts, and has generally constrained Coast Guard operations. We are concerned that the Coast Guard would not be able to maintain maritime presence, respond to individual and national emergencies, and protect our nation's economic and environmental interests.

The Coast Guard is a lean service with 41,700 active duty members supporting 11 statutory missions worldwide. In 2016, the Coast Guard prevented a record breaking 416,000 pounds of illegal drugs worth nearly \$5.6 billion from entering the United States. Central resources for preventing illicit drugs from pouring into the United States are the Coast Guard's aging fleet of High Endurance Cutters, Medium Endurance Cutters, and Island Class Patrol Boats. Although the Coast Guard has continued to demonstrate the ability to accomplish more with less, the service's operational tempo is unsustainable as its infrastructure continues to age and becomes technologically obsolete. For years, administration budget requests have demonstrated poor support of Coast Guard acquisitions and asset recapitalization. Between 2010 and 2015, the acquisition budget decreased by 40 percent. In 2016, Congress restored funding for acquisitions, but we have a long way to go. The Coast Guard acquisition budget continues to constrain needed investments for priority platforms such as polar icebreakers, national security cutters, offshore patrol cutters, fast response cutters, and Great Lakes icebreakers.

The proposed reduction of the Coast Guard's budget by 11.8 percent would directly contradict the priorities articulated by the Trump Administration, in particular the President's priorities regarding enhanced maritime security needs and desire to invest in our nation's military. As one of five branches of the Armed Forces, the Coast Guard plays a vital role in our national security. Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, in his previous role as Commanding Officer of United States Southern Command, testified before Congress in support of recapitalization of the Coast Guard's deteriorating cutter fleet. This recapitalization effort could not be carried out under the proposed budget cut. He also attested to the fact that the most effective non-violent means to interdict drugs is through our maritime borders. It is much more difficult for the United States to seize illegal drugs that are being trafficked by land once our southern border is crossed— it is better to intercept the drugs closer to their source before they are dispersed. Without the operational platforms, resources, and personnel to carry out these missions, the Coast Guard will be unable to adequately secure our maritime borders.

The proposed disestablishment of the Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSST) and the Maritime Security Response Team (MSRT) would significantly reduce the Coast Guard's ability to conduct port

security, anti-terrorism force protection, and maritime infrastructure protection operations. These units are a cornerstone of the Coast Guard's statutory missions of Port and Waterways Security and National Defense. Disestablishing them would be negligent and detrimental to our national security.

The United States is facing a potential eight-year gap in heavy icebreaking capability between when the *Polar Star* retires and when a new heavy icebreaker will be commissioned. It is irresponsible to continue to kick the can down the road, denying the Coast Guard the assets needed to meet mission requirements in the polar regions. Decreases in Arctic sea ice have resulted in increased vessel traffic in the Arctic, upping the need for consistent Coast Guard presence summer through fall. In August 2016, the passenger cruise ship *Crystal Serenity*, with more than 1,700 passengers onboard, became the largest commercial cruise ship to navigate the Northwest Passage. Recognizing the opportunity in the Arctic, many nations have made significant investments in polar icebreakers. For example, Russia currently has a fleet of 41 icebreakers with 11 more in the planning and construction process. In December 2016, China began construction on its first domestically built polar icebreaker which will have an operational range of 20,000 nautical miles and is forecasted for final completion by 2019. Yet, as the race to the Arctic is well underway, the United States icebreaker fleet remains woefully inadequate to meet emerging transportation, security, and scientific support demands.

Driven by Presidential directives and national military and maritime strategies, over the past three years, the Coast Guard has published its Arctic, Western Hemisphere, Cyber, and Human Capital strategies. Unfortunately, with a stagnant operating budget, the growing mission requirements resulting from these strategies force the Coast Guard to make significant tradeoffs—trade-offs that negatively impact the quality of life of Coast Guard members and their families. In particular, very little has been done to support the health care needs of Coast Guard families assigned to geographic regions with an absence of sufficient military and civilian health care networks. The Coast Guard is far behind in making investments in family support services, such as childcare services that are already offered to Department of Defense members and families.

We are acutely aware of the budget constraints facing our nation, however we believe that the men and women serving in the Coast Guard deserve operational assets, stable infrastructure, and the tools they need to do their jobs and support their families. We urge you to restore the \$1.3 billion dollar cut to the Coast Guard budget, which we firmly believe would result in catastrophic negative impacts to the Coast Guard and its critical role in protecting our homeland, our economy and our environment.

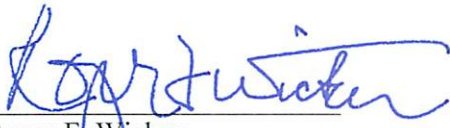
Sincerely,




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United States Senator

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United States Senator

Gary Peters
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



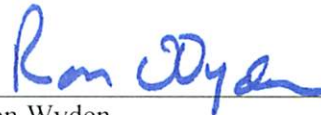
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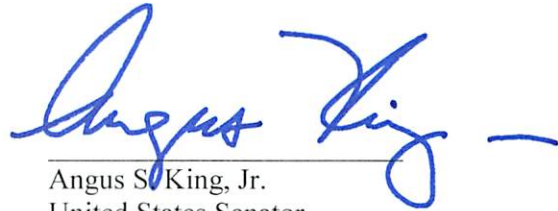
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Maggie Hassan
United States Senator



Kamala Harris
United States Senator

CC: Department of Homeland Security, Secretary John F. Kelly
United States Coast Guard, Commandant, Admiral Paul F. Zukunft