



**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION**
Senator Maria Cantwell, Chair

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U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Executive Session

September 14, 2022

OPENING STATEMENT

[VIDEO](#)

Today, the Committee will consider the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 that was introduced by myself and the Ranking Member Senator Wicker and the Oceans Subcommittee Chair, Senator Baldwin.

This bipartisan bill represents a lot of hard work on both sides of the aisle and I want to thank all of our colleagues and their staff for their hard work.

The United States Coast Guard's mission has never been more critical to our nation's economy, environment, and security than it is today.

From the increasingly important Arctic, where the Coast Guard provides an important presence, to the Pacific Ocean where the Coast Guard protects orcas and wildlife, and across the nation where the Coast Guard keeps maritime commerce moving—we depend on the men and women of the Coast Guard.

Before I talk further about this legislation, I'd like to first say first of all that my heart goes out to the families and friends of those who lost loved ones in the tragic seaplane crash near Whidbey Island, Washington. I want to recognize the hard work that the Coast

Guard had in their role in the immediate aftermath, being there on the scene in Puget Sound immediately. This is an incredible hard and important that is done by our Coast Guard team. The National Transportation Safety Board, along with federal and local partners, must move with urgency to recover this aircraft. This brings us and will help us move forward to finding answers about this disturbing accident.

The bill we are considering today makes the investment needed to support the Coast Guard's core mission and facilities, and helps keep the Coast Guard on track on important issues like cracking down on illegal fishing, improving oil spill response, bolstering our nation's presence in the Arctic. This bill also supports members and veterans by expanding training and education opportunities, improving housing, child care and other services.

This bill gives important work to the Coast Guard's mission in the State of Washington.

It directs the Coast Guard to build a fleet of 52-foot motor lifeboats. And I visited Cape Disappointment with Admiral Fagan this past [August], where I saw firsthand how shipping vessels, fishermen, recreational public all encounter challenges as they cross the Columbia river bar. So it is critically important that the Coast Guard has the kind of rescue vessels that make them safe and help make the rest of the commerce and maritime economy moving through this region.

This bill also advances the presence in the Arctic and authorizes a third heavy icebreaker, which is important to help speed up the process of moving forward on having an Arctic covered by our facilities for icebreaking.

The Arctic is changing at an alarming rate. In fact, several scientists project the Arctic could be ice-free in most late summers as of 2030. This opening of the Northwest Passage will be an important issue for us to deal with as China and Russia plan more aggressive activities, it's important for the United States to have this capability.

I am also happy that the bipartisan bill in front of us moves the needle further on protecting Southern resident orca conservation.

The bill creates a joint pilot program between the Coast Guard and NOAA to improve real-time tracking of orcas in Puget Sound to minimize the impact of vessels on these endangered whales.

During her confirmation hearing, the Commandant told our committee that addressing workforce challenges was her top priority.

And that is why this legislation in front of us invests in recruitment by expanding the Junior-Reserve Officer Training Corps and authorizing new training facilities at Cape May.

This bill also makes real investments in programs aimed at *retaining* Coast Guard members, like expanding access to higher quality child care, requiring Coast Guard to address the urgent needs for more affordable housing for members, and builds on the success of previous Coast Guard bills by continuing to expand programs needed to retain and enhance diversity within the Coast Guard workforce.

This legislation also includes necessary improvements to Coast Guard oil spill response across the country and a crackdown on illegal fishing and forced labor on the high seas.

The bill requires:

- Expansion of NOAA's oil spill database for improved oil spill preparedness;
- A new Coast Guard program to improve oil spill response operations, increase vessel response; and
- A national study on regional and local oil spill response plans and effectiveness.

This bill also improves the enforcement and intergovernmental coordination needed to catch illegal fishermen on the high seas and train NOAA and Coast Guard personnel to identify instances of forced labor, oppression, child labor in international fishing industry.

I want to thank Senator Wicker for his work to expand the Coast Guard's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps "ROTC" that every high school kid will have the opportunity to improve their studies, their fitness, and access to future careers in the Coast Guard. Among the many contributions to this legislation but particularly want to thank the Ranking Member for that.

- Subcommittee Chair Baldwin led work on the Great Lakes title of this legislation and provided leadership on improving the Child Care Subsidy Programs;
- Senator Duckworth authored provisions that require the Coast Guard to increase efforts to implement artificial intelligence, and machine learning, and digital technologies;
- Senator Sullivan worked to improve provisions to support fishermen and improve oil spill response in Western Alaska;
- And I want to thank Senator Schatz for his expertise and focusing on optimizing operations with the Coast Guard's Western Pacific region and Air Station Barbers Point in Oahu;
- Senators Peters and Markey championed improvements to the Coast Guard oil spill response program;
- And Senator Cruz and I worked on an amendment to improve the Military to Mariner Program for Coast Guard members and bolster our maritime workforce—so I want to thank him for that;
- Our colleagues Senators Capito and Lee worked to improve mariner credentialing, which is critical to helping people access family-wage jobs in the maritime industry; and
- Senator Scott for his efforts in handling national security issues related to the Florida Straits and Caribbean region.

So I want to thank all our colleagues for helping us get this important legislation in front of us this morning and for their hard work.

And now I'll turn to my Ranking Member, Senator Wicker, and again thank you for your great leadership on this important legislation.