

WebMemo



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U.S. Coast Guard Budget Cuts: The Wrong Direction to Take

The Heritage Foundation

In the past six months, the U.S. Coast Guard has played instrumental roles in relief efforts in Haiti and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico—in addition to its regular duties fighting drug smuggling and protecting America's shorelines. Yet Congress and the Administration are still intent on gutting the Coast Guard's resources, which are already stretched far too thin.

Below are some recent analyses from The Heritage Foundation that make the case for preserving a minimum of funding and resources for the Coast Guard so that it can perform all that the nation asks of it.

Massive Oil Spill Makes Case for Reversing Obama Coast Guard Cuts

WebMemo No. 2894

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/05/Massive-Oil-Spill-Makes-Case-for-Reversing-Obama-Coast-Guard-Cuts>

The President's 2011 budget request for the U.S. Coast Guard would further undermine a service already under strain. This budget proposal greatly exacerbates a trend begun after 9/11 of asking more and more from the Coast Guard without providing the resources to do the job. The recent disaster in the Gulf Coast, where a massive oil spill now threatens to cause billions of dollars in environmental damage, demonstrates how under-funding the Coast Guard is adding unacceptable risk to the safety, security, and prosperity of all Americans.

Reject Coast Guard's Maritime Security and Counterterrorism Mission Budget Cuts

WebMemo No. 2829

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/03/Reject-Coast-Guards-Maritime-Security-and-Counterterrorism-Mission-Budget-Cuts>

The Coast Guard's advanced interdiction and counterterrorism capabilities are being scaled back at a time when they should be expanded. The President's FY 2011 budget request for the Coast Guard explores killing five of the 12 Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSSTs) in addition to nine aircraft and five cutters. Worse yet, a recently leaked memo from the nominee to become the next commandant of the Coast Guard proposes further reducing critical capabilities—such as the Maritime Security Response Team.

The Coast Guard's maritime security and counterterrorism missions are taking on water and are at risk if President Obama's budget request is enacted without congressional intervention.

Therefore, Congress should hold oversight hearings and require a study to determine both Coast Guard law enforcement specialist requirements and an associate national training structure. This could

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<http://report.heritage.org/wm2901>

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then be used to build a comprehensive plan for maritime response that includes standards for local, state, and federal maritime law enforcement.

Congress should also demand that the current commandant submit an unfunded priorities list to Members documenting the shortfalls in capabilities due to arbitrary budget topline. Finally, Congress should reject the maritime team cuts and examine whether the MSSTs—to be fully effective—need to be expanded to 17 with additional helicopters and more specialized training.

U.S. Coast Guard at Risk: Modernization Plans Sinking Under Budget Constraints

WebMemo No. 2812

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/02/>

US-Coast-Guard-at-Risk-Modernization-Plans-Sinking-Under-Budget-Constraints

Given the backbreaking demands currently placed on American forces around the world, the U.S. military's significant humanitarian response efforts in Haiti have been extraordinary. This response has been led by the frequently forgotten fifth member of the U.S. Armed Forces: the U.S. Coast Guard.

Yet despite its vital contribution to homeland defense and international security, the Coast Guard's future ability to respond to maritime crises is at risk, and the President's pending budget request will hasten the fleet's decline. The President's fiscal year (FY) 2011 budget request would send this service—

which is at a turning point—in the wrong direction and allow it to hollow out more quickly.

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Thad Allen is preparing to accept reduced readiness levels in order to modernize the service's assets, yet this either/or approach is unacceptable. Instead, Congress must remedy the operational gap exposed by the President's budget request and address the funding modernization shortfalls facing the Coast Guard this year, particularly those for icebreakers, cutters, medium response boats, and patrol aircraft.

Congress must also consider the President's budget-driven personnel cuts and seek to free up funds elsewhere in order to avoid dramatic end-strength reductions.

An Indispensable Force. In 2000, the Inter-agency Task Force on Roles and Missions concluded that “If the Coast Guard did not exist, it would be in the best interests of the country to invent it, quickly.” Fast forward to 2010, where the best support the White House can provide for this vital service is to cut its budget, keep its recapitalization project in neutral, and dismiss nearly 1,000 Coast Guardsmen.

A robust Coast Guard is essential to preventing future disasters at sea by enforcing regulations that prevent industrial accidents or thwarting deliberately malicious activity. Furthermore, cuts will only ensure that the federal response to the next disaster will be worse.