

U. S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

U.S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF

ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN

ON THE

NOMINATION OF LINDA L. FAGAN

TO BE COMMANDANT OF THE U.S. COAST GUARD

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,

SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

U.S. SENATE

APRIL 28, 2022

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, and distinguished members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you today. I can think of no greater privilege than to continue my service to the Nation as the 27th Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard. I am humbled and grateful for the confidence and trust President Biden and Secretary Mayorkas placed in me with their nomination. I look forward to sharing my views and vision for our Service and I look forward to answering your questions. The work required to build tomorrow's Coast Guard has already begun. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing this work with you.

I want to acknowledge and thank Admiral Karl Schultz, who led our Service with distinction through historic challenges. Under his leadership, and with the help of the Administration and this Committee, the Coast Guard is making great strides to improve our readiness, responsiveness, and resilience. He redoubled our focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion; improved our ability to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual assault; as well as identified and removed numerous legacy barriers to recruitment and retention of a talented workforce that more closely mirrors the Nation we serve. I celebrate the progress we have made over the past four years, however there is still much work to be done. I am committed to continuing to move the organization forward to ensure we have the workforce and readiness the Nation expects.

The Journey

My 37 years of Coast Guard service prepares me well to serve as the Commandant. I have operated on all seven continents, across the breadth of our missions, and among international, federal, state, tribal, and local partners. Those experiences instilled in me a deep understanding of this Service's value to the Nation. I have a deep foundation in our role in the domestic marine transportation system, including regulation, oversight, and partnerships with the commercial maritime industry. I have held Joint Service positions in the Department of Defense and led global operations supporting National Defense and Homeland Security. I have commanded front line Coast Guard operations, managed national emergencies and responses, negotiated international standards, and collaborated at the most senior levels of government. My career has been dedicated to keeping the American people and our maritime commerce safe and secure at home and abroad. I remain committed to that purpose.

The Coast Guard has fought in every armed conflict that the United States has engaged in for nearly 232 years. Our dedicated and professional workforce has served in harrowing conditions during war, peace, and times of change. The Coast Guard frequently led as our society moved forward. More than one hundred women served as lighthouse keepers beginning in the 1830s, like Ida Lewis in Rhode Island. In 1880 Richard Etheridge took command of Pea Island Lifesaving Station, the first African-American to command a federal installation. During World War II, Dorothy Stratton led the 10,000 volunteers of the Women's Reserve of the U. S. Coast Guard Reserve (the "SPARs") who performed critical wartime duties. Our history is full of pioneers who paved the way, for not just me, but for our entire workforce. I am fully committed to providing opportunity to our entire workforce and creating a sense of belonging as we serve the Nation.

America's Coast Guard Today

Our total workforce of over 57,000 Active Duty, Reserve, and Civilian personnel, supported by 21,000 Auxiliary volunteers, serve around the globe. They are the heart of the Coast Guard and live by our core values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty. I am committed to upholding these values, which implicitly include a culture of inclusion and respect.

As America's maritime first responder, the Coast Guard is woven into communities along the Pacific, Atlantic, Arctic, and Gulf Coasts as well as the Great Lakes and navigable inland rivers. I embrace the many ways we contribute to our Nation's safety and prosperity: we rescue mariners in distress, protect vital marine natural resources, break ice to facilitate commerce, inspect ships to verify safety and pollution controls, deliver aid after a disaster, mark navigable waterways to keep mariners safe from hazards, secure our ports and harbors, and interdict illegal drugs far from our shores.

As an operational Component within the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard is committed to the Secretary's priorities, including maritime border security, full participation in crisis response, and the protection of critical infrastructure, particularly in the cyber domain. I am committed to being a leader in the Department who will collaborate as we work to ensure that the Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security are ready for the next emerging threat.

In our role as the only military Service within the Department of Homeland Security, we are aligned with the Department of Defense to reduce risk across numerous homeland security and national security challenges. The Coast Guard's unique authorities and capabilities complement our sister Services in the Department of Defense and enrich our relationships with international partners and allies.

Increasingly, the demand for Coast Guard services is global and comes from many levels of government. As a leader among the Coast Guards of the world, we model and uphold the rule of law at sea, contribute to our country's global standing, and counter both state and non-state malign actions. Our strong partnerships with international governments and organizations are critical to addressing transnational maritime threats. In an increasingly connected world, our global partnerships protect Americans' interests at home.

The Coast Guard America Needs Tomorrow

The Coast Guard advances America's national and economic security. We will not waver from our core missions that keep Americans safe. We will respond to mariners in distress and to incidents of pollution that threaten our waters. We will uphold the security of our ports and critical infrastructure. As a former icebreaker sailor, I am committed to our Nation's icebreaking fleet as it protects our sovereignty in the Arctic, our interests in Antarctica, and keeps our Great Lakes and Northeast ports open for safe navigation every winter.

And as the Service's most senior Marine Inspector, I am committed to the Coast Guard's role as a regulator to protect the resilience of our marine transportation system that facilitates more than \$5 trillion in economic activity every year. A resilient maritime industry requires safety for mariners, who have the right to work in an environment free from sexual assault and sexual harassment. I am committed to preventing these occurrences and responding to allegations within our jurisdiction.

We will continue to reinforce the maritime norms on the world's oceans that keep America safe. The racing stripe painted on our ships will remain a symbol of professionalism, good governance, and hope. A global Coast Guard presence creates security at home and strengthens partners and allies as they counter threats to their sovereignty and prosperity. I will continue to foster partnerships and capacity with nations who uphold maritime governance to prevent the flow of narcotics, and to deter illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

However – the world is changing rapidly and the Coast Guard must keep pace. The new forces influencing our operating environment are numerous. The global pandemic reshaped our economy and maritime supply chains. Climate change is creating new demands in the high latitudes and resilience challenges at home. Rapid advances in technology, increased reliance on data, and growing cyber threats created an entirely new domain of operations. The ongoing attack on democracy and the rule of law in Ukraine, and the pacing threat China presents, are changing the international security landscape. All of these factors are changing not only demand for Coast Guard missions, but also the communities where our people live and work. If confirmed, I will focus on several areas of emphasis.

My highest priority will be to modernize our talent management system, which has not significantly changed in 75 years, to best recruit and retain our people in the 21st century. Without our people we will not be able to maintain or operate our cutters, boats, aircraft, or technology, or uphold standards for commercial vessel safety or pollution prevention. The Coast Guard workforce of tomorrow must reflect the American public we serve and requires the tools, policy, training, and support to succeed across all our mission areas.

The people joining our Service today have expectations different from those who served in the past. Therefore, we must adjust the way we recruit, train and retain them and their families. We will seek expanded opportunities for our workforce and their families to access high quality healthcare, housing, and childcare. We will remain relentless in our effort to eradicate harmful behaviors, such as sexual assault and sexual harassment, from our Service. We will continue to revisit policies that deter otherwise qualified members from continuing their careers, and instead we will actively pursue means to encourage our brightest talent to stay. Similarly, we will pursue new training designs to engage our workforce in meaningful learning, whether in a classroom or in the field. These actions will advance mission excellence and enhance our workforce's sense of belonging. I am committed to pursuing transformational change in the way we recruit, retain, and support our workforce.

To accomplish the broad spectrum of Coast Guard missions, we will provide our workforce the assets they need to maintain a competitive edge over malign actors. This includes a modern fleet of cutters, small boats, and aircraft that will be supplemented by unmanned systems and sensors. Equally importantly, we need data systems to enable rapid sharing of information and provide our operational commanders decision advantage. Smart application of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence will allow us to make the best decisions as we inspect new commercial vessels, search for overdue recreational boaters, or seek to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs across our maritime border.

As important as digital systems are to our future, we will still depend on brick and mortar. Every Coast Guard mission begins and ends on shore. Our facilities, piers, and runways are as critical for operations as our ships and aircraft, and the buildings where our people eat and sleep while standing duty are as important to workforce retention as our talent management policies. With your help, I will ensure our shore infrastructure supports our operations at sea, and that every member of our Service has the safe and resilient workplace they deserve.

Given the dynamic threats and evolving national security priorities, we must also transform how we employ our forces. The Coast Guard will be a leader in global maritime governance by enforcing the rule of law, facilitating safe and secure maritime commerce, and protecting people and natural resources regardless of the changing geopolitical landscape. We will employ our assets and people to optimize mission excellence, finding new and innovative force employment models. The Coast Guard will best serve the Nation by applying our resources to the highest priority missions that only we can uniquely perform.

Conclusion

I am grateful to Congress, and this Committee in particular, for your interest, dedication, and support of our Coast Guard and its workforce. Your commitment to them, and their dedication to the mission, ensures the Coast Guard continues to answer the Nation's call. I hope to be able to work together with you in the future to move this great service forward. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to your questions.