



Focus on defense budgets leaves Coast Guard high and dry

BY JEFFREY E. PHILLIPS, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 11/04/18 08:00 AM EST
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Congratulations to Congress for passing the fiscal year [2019 defense budget](#). We won't begrudge the accolades that resounded in Capitol Hill offices on the occasion of lawmakers simply having done their job. Yet the job isn't fully done. The U.S. Coast Guard, essential to homeland security, remains unfunded for next year.

The Coast Guard and its reserve are managed and funded from two sections of federal law: Title 10, which governs the Department of Defense (DOD), under whose control Coast Guard units may operate in war; and Title 14, which governs the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The [2019 Homeland Security Appropriations Bill](#) would be the primary source of Coast Guard funding.

The Coast Guard is operating under a continuing resolution, its 34th CR since the start of FY 2010. As is the case with the other armed services, CRs erode readiness at a time when security threats are high — and increasing.

As America's maritime first responder, our Coast Guard must be "[ready, relevant and responsive](#)," as its guiding principles state. Integral to its readiness, the Coast Guard Reserve must respond to all hazards within 48 hours.

Coast Guard reservists in port security units deploy to Guantanamo Bay to provide "around-the-clock anti-terrorism force protection and security along the coastline and the naval station's defensive sea area, which extends three miles from Naval Station Guantanamo Bay's shoreline," according to Master Chief Petty Officer Ryan Hooper, command master chief, 13th District.

As former Coast Guard commandant, Adm. Paul F. Zukunft, testified to Congress in March, “Over a five-week period, Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria and Nate impacted over 2,540 miles of shoreline and Coast Guard men and women in helicopters, boats, cutters, vehicles and on foot rescued over 11,300 people and over 1,500 pets.”

The Coast Guard, whose “Semper Paratus” motto means “Always Ready,” repeated its performance for the no-notice Hurricane Michael.

Everyone is familiar with stories about Coast Guard rescues from capsized boats. Less known is that the Coast Guard and its reservists serve worldwide, supporting DOD combatant commanders on all seven continents. That support includes participating in exercises with other naval forces to strengthen tactical proficiency in critical mission areas. Operational support also is provided to commands with security for Iraqi oil platforms, which the Coast Guard has supplied since 2003.

Lapses in appropriations break faith and cause undue stress on our military and civilian workforce and their families. Under CR limited funding, or a government shutdown in a budget food fight (which could happen perhaps as early as Dec. 8), our Coast Guard would be unable to complete search-and-rescue cases and save the lives of men, women and children without reducing their maritime presence elsewhere.

In a shutdown, the Coast Guard would not be able to provide military pay, allowances and health care or civilian benefits and retirement contributions.

It would not be able to repeat its previous success of seizing up to 20 percent of the drugs coming into the country, more than land-based law enforcement agencies.

Unfortunately, the Coast Guard budget did not get reported to the House until Sept. 12, 2018. This is an issue because the House and Senate now are out until Nov. 13. After the election, they will have only 12 workdays before the CR ends on Dec. 7, 2018 (Pearl Harbor Day).

In the meantime, America’s chief domestic maritime security force needs the same rebuilding that has bedeviled our overcommitted and underfunded military.

In his final State of the Coast Guard address in May, Adm. Zukunft said tomorrow’s Coast Guard “will need 5 percent annualized growth in operations and maintenance account, and a \$2 billion floor for acquisitions to continue to do so.”

A CR beaches that growth; in fact, it erodes readiness, stunts growth of existing capabilities, requiring wasteful administrative practices, and largely halts new programs. With Arctic contention growing between Russia and the United States, the Coast Guard has but one heavy icebreaker — and it’s 40 years old.

Incoming Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz is managing a demand for services that “has never been higher.” He is “guardedly optimistic” that Congress will include \$750 million in the budget for a new heavy icebreaker requested by the president, but so far that hasn’t happened.

The admiral says he really needs three heavies to do the job. We believe him; the Coast Guard tells it straight. Never an agency to exaggerate needs, this team is imbued with an ethic of dogged mission orientation, even when shortchanged resources.

The value of the U.S. Coast Guard was aptly summed up by Howard Coble, the late Republican congressman from North Carolina, whose service in

the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve spanned 22 years: “The Coast Guard has long been known as the armed service that gets more done for less.”

For America’s Coast Guard, staying “Semper Paratus” will take some congressional “semper spendus.” Congress, it’s time to weigh anchor on a robust Coast Guard budget.

Jeffrey Phillips is executive director of ROA, dba Reserve Organization of America, open to all ranks and promoting a strong, ready reserve force. He is a retired U.S. Army Reserve major general.

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