House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Rep. Bill Shuster, Chairman

The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2017 - Division E

The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2017 supports and strengthens the United States Coast Guard, one of our Nation's five armed services in its critical missions to: save lives; safeguard our shores; protect living marine resources; and facilitate a 21st century maritime transportation system. These missions include: search and rescue, maritime safety, maritime law enforcement, drug and migrant interdiction, maintaining aids-to-navigation, icebreaking, marine environmental protection, oil spill prevention and response, defense readiness, and ports, waterway, and coastal security. This legislation also helps replace and modernize the Coast Guard's aging assets in a cost effective and efficient manner; enhances oversight; and reduces inefficiencies to save taxpayer dollars.

Background:

- The Coast Guard consists of approximately 40,000 active duty military personnel, 6,400 reservists, and 8,400 civilian employees. This unique and adaptable military force falls under the Department of Homeland Security during peace time but may become a specialized force within the Navy during times of war.

- Every year, the men and women of the Coast Guard conduct tens of thousands of operations to help ensure the safety of Americans and those traveling by sea. In FY2015, the Coast Guard: responded to over 16,000 search and rescue cases saving over 3,500 lives; conducted nearly 8,600 security boardings of vessels entering U.S. ports; screened over 131,000 commercial vessels entering U.S. ports for potential security threats; maintained over 47,000 aids to navigation; and detained 503 smugglers carrying 107 metric tons of cocaine.

This legislation:

- Ensures the Coast Guard has the resources it needs to successfully conduct critical missions by authorizing appropriations for FY2018 and FY2019.

- Supports Coast Guard recommended military strength and training levels.

- Helps to keep the modernization of aging Coast Guard assets, such as critically needed aircraft updates, new vessels, and related technology on schedule and on budget.

- Improves training competencies by allowing the Commandant to include other federal and non-federal public safety personnel to participate in Coast Guard training to further the goal of interoperability among first responder agencies.

- Requires the Commandant to establish a land-based unmanned aircraft system program to support and assist Coast Guard assets and personnel to improve mission effectiveness.

- Requires the National Academy of Sciences to review existing and emerging unmanned, autonomous, or remotely controlled maritime domain awareness technologies and make recommendations on how these technologies can assist the Coast Guard in its mission performance and in more effectively and efficiently allocating its vessels, aircraft and personnel.

- Enhances accountability in acquisitions by providing the Commandant with a number of contracting authorities for major acquisition programs to reduce costs, promote efficiencies, and improve the quality of assets delivered.

- Eliminates the need for "official" logbooks at a savings to taxpayers and provides regulatory flexibility for vessel operators.

- Promotes transit lane safety by authorizing funding to continue Coast Guard marine debris activities and implements recommendations to ensure safe and secure transit lanes for maritime transportation.

- Promotes common sense regulations by updating public notice requirements for bridge work and requires the Commandant to review certain inspection fees to ensure the fee matches government costs.

- Reduces burdensome regulations by requiring sufficient notice to the fishing industry when alternative safety compliance measures are prescribed for certain fishing and associated vessels to promote safety on older vessels without causing economic harm.

- Removes red tape and promotes improved maritime commerce by allowing payment for construction of certain aids-to-navigation constructed by non-federal entities.