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Oversight Hearing on the President's Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Requests for Coast Guard and NOAA

Witnesses:

Admiral Robert Papp Jr.

Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

The Honorable Kathryn Sullivan

Acting NOAA Administrator, Acting Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

Committee Members Present:

Mark Begich (D-AK), Subcommittee Chairman

Marco Rubio (R-FL), Subcommittee Ranking Member

Roger Wicker (R-MS)

Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)

Mo Cowan (D-MA)

Bill Nelson (D-FL)

On April 23, 2013, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard held an oversight hearing to receive testimony on President Obama's proposed fiscal year (FY) 2014 budget for the Coast Guard and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Subcommittee Chairman Mark Begich (D-AK) discussed the many responsibilities of the Coast Guard in his opening statement including protecting the marine environment and responding to "pollution incidents." He commended the Coast Guard's 2012 "unprecedented" Arctic Shield operation which "respond[ed] to the increased...energy activity" in the arctic. He voiced concern over the FY 2014's "nearly billion-dollar reduction proposed for the Coast Guard" indicating it could hinder the ability to "replace our polar-class icebreakers."

Regarding NOAA, Begich stated, "NOAA's accurate observations and forecasts are essential to the nation's weather-dependent industries like agriculture, aviation and shipping. For these sectors, weather forecasts mean...economic vitality, critical business decisions and, indeed, lives depend on their accuracy." He praised NOAA for their role in dealing with "increasing incidents of severe weather" and their forecasting of Hurricane Sandy which allowed for "advance warning which saved lives and property." He noted the importance of NOAA's hydrographic survey vessels in keeping [open] shipping channels impacted by the storm." He mentioned the "critical" nature of "timely review and permitting of oil and gas activities to ensure its compatibility with marine mammal populations." He supported the modest increase proposed for NOAA in the FY 2014 budget. He noted that "most [funding] is to maintain its vital satellite tracking capabilities but also other for ocean observations, fish stock assessments, and basic research into climate and marine debris, among other programs." He raised concerns over the possibility of furloughs affecting "essential services" and cuts in certain programs.

In this opening statement, Subcommittee Ranking Member Marco Rubio (R-FL) primarily discussed NOAA's role in relation to the fishing industry. He expressed apprehension over NOAA's intent to "list 66 species of coral under the Endangered Species Act" and what affect such action would have on marine industries. Rubio also indicated concern that President Obama's newly released implementation plan for the National Ocean Policy will become a "new regulatory regime" with "severe economic consequences."

Admiral Robert Papp, commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, stated in his testimony that the Coast Guard "recently completed an overhaul of the cutter *Polar Star*, returning the Nation's only heavy icebreaker to active service." He noted in his written

testimony that the FY 2014 budget request includes “funding for pre-acquisition activities for a new Coast Guard polar icebreaker” that will replace *Polar Star* around 2022, its “projected end of service life.”

Acting NOAA Administrator and Acting Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere Kathryn Sullivan testified that the FY 2014 budget request “builds on a year of considerable achievement for NOAA” and makes “important strides toward healthier balance” between their oceanic and atmospheric mission areas. She discussed NOAA’s role in “forecasting... [Hurricane Sandy’s] track and impacts” and “help[ing] Americans prepare for, respond to, and recover from this devastating storm.” NOAA worked to predict weather and “record storm surges days in advance,” survey “ports just hours after storm passage,” and remap “devastated shorelines and coastal communities.” NOAA made a “suite of changes” to the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) resulting in “more than \$1 billion in lifecycle cost savings,” improved management, and an earlier launch date of 2021 that “reduce[s] the likelihood” of a data gap. NOAA improved JPSS, Sullivan stated, through collaboration with NASA which “sharpened the programs focus on our weather missions while ensuring the continuity of our space based climate record through 2021.”

Roger Wicker (R-MS) asked about the NOAA weather satellite which greatly exceeded “initial cost estimates, resulting in shrinking of other program budgets.” Sullivan responded that NOAA has worked “terribly hard” in moving away from the “fatally flawed” National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS) which has been replaced by the JPSS. JPSS has been on schedule and within budget “quite regularly” and the Government Accountability Office confirmed that management is “now in sound hands.” She noted the \$1 billion reduction in the cost for JPSS.

Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) inquired if NOAA furloughs would affect their emergency response capabilities. Sullivan noted that NOAA has a furlough of up to four days agency-wide and will ensure “flexibility [for managers] to adapt to emerging situations.” Begich asked about the budget request for the heavy icebreaker program. Papp replied that the Coast Guard has operating funds in its budget for the *Polar Star* icebreaker which “is ready for operations.” Following a training mission this summer 2013 to the arctic, the *Polar Star* will head to McMurdo Station in Antarctica in February. Restorations to *Polar Star* cost around \$65 million and it is expected to be operational for 10 years when it will be replaced by a new heavy icebreaker. He stated that funds in the FY 2013 and 2014 budget will allow planning to commence for constructing the new heavy icebreaker. The FY 2014 budget requests only \$2 million because unused funds will carry over from FY 2013.

Rubio discussed NOAA’s increase in their number of days at sea by 1,400 days for 2012 to 3,500 days for 2014.

Begich mentioned the \$111 million for NOAA in the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, 2013 (P.L. 113-2) which Sullivan stated is focused “on identifying actions that could be taken to mitigate the degradation of forecast accuracy and reliability” should there be a gap in the polar satellite observations.

Begich brought up the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean and the limitations that allow companies to drill “one well at a time in either theater, Chukchi and Beaufort,” when there are more than 600 leases. He asked if the regulations would be a “stranglehold on [an oil company’s] ability to be successful...in one of the largest oil fields in the country.” Sullivan responded that the draft EIS is “still a bit incomplete” but the supplemental “does add some flexibility in terms of how many wells and in which theater or combination of theaters” drilling can occur.

Opening statements, witness testimonies, and an archived webcast of the hearing can be found on the Committee web site.

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