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[H.R. 1987, Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015, as amended](#)

FLOOR SITUATION

On Monday, May 18, 2015, the House will consider [H.R. 1987](#), *the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015*, under suspension of the rules. H.R. 1987 was introduced on April 23, 2015, by Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) and was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, which ordered the bill reported, as amended, by voice vote on April 30, 2015.

SUMMARY

H.R. 1987 authorizes Coast Guard and Federal Maritime Commission funding levels for two years and includes provisions to improve the Coast Guard's mission effectiveness, help modernize the Service's aging vessels and other assets, and reform U.S. maritime transportation laws. The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015 is designed to support the Coast Guard's efforts to carry out its missions, while helping to replace and modernize the Coast Guard's aging assets in a cost effective manner, enhancing oversight, and reducing inefficiencies to save taxpayer dollars.

Specifically:

Title I—Authorizations

Section 101: Authorizes \$8.7 billion in discretionary funds for the Coast Guard for each of the fiscal years 2016 and 2017. This level of funding supports military pay raises for Coast Guard service-members at a level consistent with service-members of the other Armed Forces. This section also authorizes an end-of-year strength for active duty Coast Guard personnel of 43,000 for each of the fiscal years 2016 and 2017.

Section 102: Makes conforming and technical changes to title 14, United States Code.

Title II—Coast Guard

Section 201: The Coast Guard is the only Armed Service with a vice service chief that does not have the rank of a four star flag or general officer. This section would change the rank of the Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard from vice admiral to admiral to align the leadership

structure of the Coast Guard to that of the other Armed Services. This change will enable the Vice Commandant to better represent the Coast Guard and the Commandant during frequent interactions with counterparts in the other Armed Services.

Section 202: The Coast Guard is currently the only Armed Service without a chief of staff. The position was discontinued in 2011 and many of the responsibilities were assumed by the Vice Commandant. This dilutes the focus of the Vice Commandant from his traditional duties as the vice service chief. This section authorizes the Coast Guard to reinstate the position of Chief of Staff.

Section 203: Ensures that members of the Coast Guard are not held liable for administrative errors that result in overpayments of pay and benefits. Members of the other Armed Services currently receive similar protections.

Section 204: Enacts recommendations made by the General Accountability Office (GAO) to improve the performance of assets acquired, as well as oversight of the Coast Guard's acquisition process.

Section 205: Clarifies the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Section 206: Enhances oversight of the Coast Guard's effort to recapitalize its major assets by requiring the Service to develop a long term plan of its acquisition needs and the funding levels to support them.

Section 207: Removes administrative barriers in the Coast Guard's program to recognize communities that have supported the Service.

Section 208: Sets a deadline of 270 days for the Coast Guard to complete and submit to Congress its assessment of the condition of its Polar Class icebreaker POLAR SEA and its determination of whether it is cost effective to reactivate the cutter.

Section 209: Continues a limitation in current law on the authority of the Coast Guard to reassign certain aviation assets.

Section 210: Makes technical and clarifying changes to title 14, United States Code.

Section 211: Authorizes the Coast Guard to conduct a pilot program to test the effectiveness of commercially-available technology to improve the maintenance and readiness of its cutter fleet.

Section 212: Requires the Coast Guard to establish and implement a process that ensures adequate public notification when removing an aid to navigation.

Section 213: Requires the GAO to review the metrics the Coast Guard uses to evaluate its mission performance.

Section 214: Authorizes the Coast Guard to conduct a pilot program to test the effectiveness of commercially available technology to improve communications during response activities.

Section 215: Authorizes the Coast Guard to establish a graduate education program at an existing public academic institution to improve the professional development of service-members and civilian employees.

Title III—Shipping and Navigation

Section 301: Clarifies that a fishing permit is not an appurtenance to a vessel and therefore not subject to a maritime lien.

Section 302: Phases-in a requirement to carry out-of-water survival craft by passenger vessels operating in certain waters.

Section 303: Strengthens the oversight and enforcement of cargo preference laws.

Section 304: Revises the definition of model year for new recreational vessels and provides industry with appropriate discretion to market their product.

Section 305: Requires the Coast Guard to harmonize the expiration of merchant mariner credentials, radar observer endorsements, and medical certificates for certain mariners.

Section 306: Authorizes the Coast Guard to recover costs it incurs from the enforcement of safety zones around privately held events.

Section 307: Makes technical corrections to shipping and navigation law.

Section 308: Requires the Coast Guard to notify the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the actions it is taking to implement recommendations to modernize and improve its marine casualty reporting program.

Section 309: Requires the Coast Guard to update its references to recreational vessel engine weights to ensure accurate vessel floatation tests by manufacturers and improve recreational vessel safety.

Section 310: Requires the Coast Guard to certify local physicians to make medical fitness determinations of merchant mariners.

Section 311: Requires the Coast Guard to complete its Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study by April 2016 and provide a copy to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Section 312: Requires the Coast Guard to develop a Certificate of Documentation for recreational vessels that is effective for five years.

Section 313: Establishes a deadline for the Secretary of Transportation to establish guidelines to implement section 304(a) of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2006.

Title IV—Federal Maritime Commission

Section 401: Authorizes the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) for fiscal years 2016 and 2017 at currently authorized levels.

Section 402: Reforms certain functions of the FMC to improve accountability. Specifically, this section ensures that all Commissioners have the opportunity to review hiring decisions and FMC budget submissions.

Section 403: Prohibits the FMC from continuing to expend taxpayer dollars on superfluous awards for non-federal entities.

Title V—Miscellaneous

Section 501: Authorizes the Coast Guard to convey property under its administrative control to Marin County, CA, at fair market value.

Section 502: Eliminates two outdated and duplicative reports and modifies the frequency of another report.

Section 503: Requires the GAO to provide recommendations to Congress to improve the performance of functions carried out by the Coast Guard’s National Vessel Documentation Center, including compliance with laws governing U.S. ownership requirements for certain vessels.

BACKGROUND

The United States Coast Guard is one of our Nation’s five armed services whose critical missions include saving lives, safeguarding our shores, and protecting living marine resources. These missions also include search and rescue, marine 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. The Coast Guard consists of approximately 40,000 active duty military personnel, 7,500 reservists, and 8,300 civilian employees.¹

This military force falls under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) during peace time but may become a specialized force within the Navy during times of war. In 2014, the Coast Guard responded to over 17,500 search and rescue cases saving over 3,400 lives, conducted over 8,600 security boardings of vessels entering U.S. ports, inspected over 12,500 U.S. flagged commercial vessels to ensure safety and security requirements were met, maintained over 51,000 aids to navigation, and interdicted over 3,500 undocumented migrants and 140 metric tons of illegal drugs.²

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimates](#) that implementing H.R. 1987 would cost \$16.6 billion over the 2016 to 2020 period.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information, please see the following document prepared by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure:

¹ See Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure document—[“The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015.”](#) at 2.

² Id.

- [The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015](#)

STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information please contact [Jerry White](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 5-0190.