New Systems Pending, but Coast Guard ‘Stretched Thin,’ Lunday Says



Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem and Admiral Kevin Lunday, acting Commandant of the Coast Guard, shown here discussing response efforts in Washington D.C., January 30, after a helicopter and passenger jet collided. *Photo credit: U.S Coast Guard | Petty Officer 1st Class Brandon Giles*

Much-needed new ships are on the way for the U.S. Coast Guard, acting Commandant Admiral Kevin Lunday told members of a House Armed Services Committee panel on May 14 as Congress prepares to receive defense budget requests from the new administration.

Lunday noted the service quickly moved resources to the Southern U.S. border in the wake of the presidential election.

“In January of this year, under the leadership of Secretary

[Kristi] Noem, I directed our operational commanders to immediately increase Coast Guard presence along the U.S. border and maritime approaches, starting with the southern border where the president has declared a national emergency," Lunday told members of the committee's Subcommittee on Homeland Security. "We surged forces, tripling the number of forward-deployed air and surface assets in that area."

The service also moved to continue operations to control the northern border, including on the Great Lakes, to maritime approaches around Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. territories in the Pacific.

"Tasked with defending the nation's maritime borders, countering threats like illegal migration and drug trafficking, safeguarding our ports and waterways, responding to maritime disasters, and saving lives, the service is now stretched thin, with significant workforce shortages and aging, underfunded assets and infrastructure nearing collapse," he said. "The Coast Guard's current organizational structure and reactive posture are no longer adequate to meet current and emerging challenges."

Acquisitions

Last month, Lunday debuted a plan called Force Design 2028, aimed at addressing those issues. It will focus on four major areas: People, organization, acquisition and contracting and technology, including an effort to "Develop a high velocity acquisition and contracting system to rapidly deliver the assets the service needs to fulfill its commitment to the American people."

Some much-needed assets are already in the works, Lunday told members of the panel, with new production milestones achieved.

The service's top ship acquisition priority is the polar security cutter and Lunday said the first PSC received approval on April 30 for full production by Bollinger

Shipyards. Functional design maturity has topped 95 percent, so “they already are construction 10 of the pre-fabrication assembly units, which are the bottom center sections of that new icebreaker,” he said.

Likewise, the service is moving ahead to replace its aging construction tenders and river tenders, which maintain aids to navigation, and some of which have been in service since the 1940s. The DHS has approved the construction of the first eight of the new water commerce cutter being built by Birdon America, with their homeports to be decided later.

New systems are needed in the air as well, Lunday said.

The recent termination of the C-27J missionization program and stalled growth in our HC-130J program place our readiness to conduct various missions in jeopardy, including long range surveillance, disaster response, and border security operations,” he said. “For our rotary wing fleet, it is imperative that we continue and accelerate transition of air stations from the short-range MH-65E to the medium-range MH-60 to ensure sustainability and increase our capability to serve our national priorities.”