

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
U. S. COAST GUARD
STATEMENT OF MASTER CHIEF OF THE COAST GUARD CARL W. CONSTANTINE
ON THE NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF ENLISTED PERSONNEL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND NAVIGATION
COMMITTEE ON MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
25 FEBRUARY 1986

MR. CHAIRMAN, I AM HONORED TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF THE FEELINGS, FROM THE DECK PLATES, OF OUR ENLISTED MEN AND WOMEN. BY HAVING ME HERE TODAY, YOU HAVE SENT A VERY POSITIVE SIGNAL TO OUR ENLISTED COMMUNITY THAT OUR LAWMAKERS CARE ABOUT THE DESIRES AND CONCERNS OF OUR COAST GUARD ENLISTED MEN AND WOMEN. WE SINCERELY THANK YOU FOR THAT.

AS MASTER CHIEF OF THE COAST GUARD, ONE OF MY PRIMARY FUNCTIONS IS ADVISING THE COMMANDANT ON ENLISTED MATTERS. THEREFORE, I MUST MAKE SURE I AM WELL INFORMED ON CURRENT ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO ENLISTED PEOPLE. I DO THIS BY VISITING OUR UNITS, ASKING QUESTIONS, AND LISTENING. MANY POSITIVE CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OUR PEOPLE THROUGH THIS PROCESS.

OVERVIEW OF THE COAST GUARD'S ENLISTED FORCE STRUCTURE

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT I PERCEIVE ARE PARTICULAR NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF THE COAST GUARD'S ENLISTED MEMBERS, I WOULD LIKE TO GIVE YOU AN OVERVIEW OF OUR

ENLISTED FORCE STRUCTURE. OUR ACTIVE ENLISTED FORCE CONSISTS OF OVER 30,800 MEN AND WOMEN. THE AVERAGE AGE OF AN ENLISTED MEMBER IS 27 YEARS AND THE AVERAGE TIME IN SERVICE OF A MEMBER IS 6.8 YEARS. OUR CHIEFS AND PETTY OFFICERS SERVE IN TWENTY-FOUR MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTIES OR RATINGS ASSIGNED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AT APPROXIMATELY 1000 DIFFERENT COMMANDS. MANY ARE ASSIGNED TO ISOLATED OR REMOTE AREAS. THE SIZE OF OUR COMMANDS ALSO VARIES GREATLY. FOR EXAMPLE, GOVERNORS ISLAND, NEW YORK, HAS OVER 1350 ENLISTED PERSONNEL ONBOARD; HOWEVER, THE MAJORITY OF OUR COMMANDS HAVE A MUCH SMALLER COMPLEMENT WITH LESS THAN 50 ENLISTED MEMBERS ATTACHED.

PARTICULAR NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF ENLISTED MEMBERS

DESPITE THE GREAT DIVERSITY OF OUR ENLISTED FORCE IN TERMS OF AGE, ETHNIC ORIGIN, GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION, AND MILITARY SPECIALTIES, THEIR CONCERNS EXPRESSED TO ME DURING MY PRESENT ASSIGNMENT ARE SURPRISINGLY SIMILAR. THESE CONCERNS AND NEEDS CENTER ON QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES WHICH INCLUDE GETTING THE APPROPRIATE HARDWARE THEY NEED TO DO THEIR JOB UP TO THEIR GREAT CAPABILITY... AND ATTENDING TO THEIR PERSONAL AND FAMILY NEEDS SO THEY CAN GIVE FULL ATTENTION TO THE JOB AT HAND.

RETIREMENT SYSTEM

OUR ENLISTED PERSONNEL ARE VERY CONCERNED WITH PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PRESENT RETIREMENT SYSTEM. THE CONTINUAL DISCUSSIONS ASSOCIATED WITH CHANGES TO THE RETIREMENT SYSTEM LEAVE THEM WONDERING WHAT WILL ACTUALLY BE AVAILABLE TO

THEM WHEN THEY RETIRE. IN ADDITION TO THE UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING OUR RETIREMENT SYSTEM, THE INITIAL FEEDBACK I HAVE RECEIVED REGARDING RECENT CHANGES TO THE SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN IS ALMOST ALL NEGATIVE. OUR MEMBERS DO NOT FEEL IT IS EQUITABLE THAT THEIR SPOUSE HAS FINAL DETERMINATION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT A MEMBER PARTICIPATES IN THE PROGRAM AND TO WHAT EXTENT.

SELECTIVE REENLISTMENT BONUS (SRB) PROGRAM

CONTINUATION OF THE SRB PROGRAM IS VERY IMPORTANT TO BOTH OUR JUNIOR AND MIDDLE GRADE PETTY OFFICERS. THIS PROGRAM PROVIDES FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO RETAIN MEMBERS SERVING IN CRITICAL RATINGS IN THE SERVICE. I CONTINUALLY HEAR CONCERNS AS TO WHETHER LEGISLATION WILL BE ENACTED TO CONTINUE THE PROGRAM BEYOND SEPTEMBER 30, 1987.

MEDICAL CARE

ADEQUACY OF MEDICAL CARE FOR MEMBERS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS HAS BEEN A CONCERN EXPRESSED TO ME DURING MY MANY VISITS TO FIELD UNITS AND AT MY DESK. SINCE OUR MEMBERS ARE OFTEN ASSIGNED TO AREAS WHERE MILITARY MEDICAL FACILITIES ARE NOT AVAILABLE, A VIABLE CHAMPUS PROGRAM IS PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TO THE COAST GUARD THAN TO THE OTHER ARMED FORCES. I BELIEVE THAT DECREASING THE UP-FRONT COSTS PAYABLE BY THE MEMBER AND INCREASING THE NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS/INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL ACCEPT CHAMPUS ARE BOTH DESIRABLE.

RELOCATION COSTS

DESPITE THE INCREASED ALLOWANCES PROVIDED BY THE FY-86 DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION (PCS) TRANSFERS, A MAJORITY OF OUR MEMBERS STILL MUST FUND A PORTION OF THE MOVE THEMSELVES. ALTHOUGH THE SERVICE HAS GENERALLY INCREASED TOUR LENGTHS DURING RECENT YEARS, WHEN MEMBERS MUST RELOCATE, THE TIME REQUIRED TO SELL THEIR HOMES IS OFTEN SEVERAL MONTHS. THIS FACT, COUPLED WITH THE MEMBER BEING REQUIRED TO FUND CLOSING COSTS AND REALTY FEES ASSOCIATED WITH BOTH SELLING AND BUYING A HOME, MAKES IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR OUR ENLISTED MEMBERS TO HOLD THEIR OWN IN THE HOUSING MARKET.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

IN MY OPINION, THE ABILITY OF ALL SERVICES TO OFFER AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, SUCH AS THE NEW GI BILL, HELPS US ENLIST HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND MOTIVATED INDIVIDUALS. HOWEVER, DURING MY TRIPS I CONTINUE TO HEAR CONCERNS EXPRESSED REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THIS PROGRAM. MEMBERS WHO ENTERED THE SERVICE DURING OR PRIOR TO THE VIETNAM ERA ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING TO USE OR LOSE THEIR BENEFITS BY 1989. RECENT ENLISTEES ARE ALSO CONCERNED THAT THEY CANNOT CHANGE THEIR OPTION TO EITHER PARTICIPATE OR NOT PARTICIPATE AT A LATER DATE. ALSO, MANY OF OUR RECRUITS SIMPLY CANNOT AFFORD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PRESENT PROGRAM SINCE THEIR IRREVERSIBLE DECISION MUST BE MADE WITHIN 2 WEEKS AFTER ARRIVING AT BOOT CAMP.

HOUSING

OUR COAST GUARD PEOPLE LIVE IN A VARIETY OF HOUSING. SOME LIVE IN GOVERNMENT OWNED OR GOVERNMENT LEASED QUARTERS AND MANY LIVE IN HOUSING THEY HAVE EITHER PURCHASED OR RENTED THEMSELVES. ALL ARE VERY INTERESTED IN THE HOUSING SITUATION. BECAUSE MANY ARE ASSIGNED TO HIGH COST OR REMOTE AREAS WHERE MILITARY QUARTERS ARE NOT AVAILABLE, GOVERNMENT LEASING OF HOMES IN THE CIVILIAN COMMUNITY IS OFTEN THE ONLY WAY A LARGE PORTION OF OUR ENLISTED MEMBERS CAN OBTAIN HOUSING. IN SOME AREAS IT IS HARD TO GET LEASING EVEN FOR THE GOVERNMENT. THIS IS A VERY ESSENTIAL PROGRAM... ESPECIALLY WITH OUR JUNIOR ENLISTED PERSONNEL TOWARDS WHOM IT IS TARGETED. I ROUTINELY FIELD QUESTIONS FROM THE TROOPS REGARDING THE CONTINUATION OF THIS PROGRAM.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

HABITABILITY IMPROVEMENTS IN THEIR WORK PLACE ARE DESIRED BY MANY OF OUR PERSONNEL, ESPECIALLY THOSE SERVING ON OUR OLDER CUTTERS. ONGOING ACQUISITIONS WILL REPLACE MANY OF THESE SHIPS. HOWEVER, HABITABILITY IMPROVEMENTS AT OUR SHORE FACILITIES LAG DUE TO THE NEED TO PUT PRIORITIES ON PRODUCTIVE, SAFE, AND HABITABLE SHIPS, BOATS, AND AIRCRAFT.

PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY

THE ABILITY TO ADVANCE WITHIN THE COAST GUARD IS A MAJOR CONCERN OF EVERY ENLISTED MEMBER. EVERY MEMBER RECOGNIZES THE INCREASED PAY, ALLOWANCES, AND RESPONSIBILITY THAT ACCOMPANY A PROMOTION. HOWEVER, MANY ARE CONCERNED THAT PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES WILL DECREASE IN THE FUTURE.

PROMOTION IN THE COAST GUARD OCCURS ONLY WHEN THERE IS A VACANCY IN OUR SYSTEM. HOWEVER, DURING THE LAST FOUR YEARS, OUR PERSONNEL STRENGTH HAS DECLINED SOMEWHAT. SINCE OUR PERSONNEL SYSTEM REQUIRES TIME TO ALIGN ONBOARD STRENGTH WITH THE AUTHORIZED BILLET STRUCTURE, MANY INDIVIDUALS FEEL ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY WILL BE GREATLY DECREASED IN THE FUTURE... PARTICULARLY IF THERE IS ANY SIGNIFICANT SHRINKAGE OF OUR TOTAL FORCE STRUCTURE.

CONCLUSION

THE ISSUES I HAVE MENTIONED TODAY REPRESENT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT NEEDS AND CONCERNS EXPRESSED TO ME BY OUR ENLISTED PERSONNEL. HOWEVER, OUR MEMBERS HAVE ALSO EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR LEGISLATION WHICH HAS IMPROVED PAY AND ALLOWANCES, PROVIDED FUNDING FOR HABITABILITY UPGRADES AT OLDER UNITS, AND IMPROVED THE EQUIPMENT USED IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR JOBS. HOWEVER, WE MUST ALSO BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN THE DEDICATED AND TALENTED PEOPLE NECESSARY TO KEEP THIS NEW GEAR RUNNING AND IN TOP SHAPE. WITHOUT THEM, ALL THE EQUIPMENT IN THE WORLD MEANS NOTHING.

OUR MEN AND WOMEN ARE VERY AWARE OF THE NEED TO REDUCE OUR NATIONAL DEFICIT. REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME OF THIS OR ANY OTHER BUDGET, THEY WILL BE THERE DOING THE BEST THEY CAN WITH WHAT THEY HAVE. THEY ARE "SEMPER PARATUS"... ALWAYS READY TO SAVE LIVES, ENFORCE OUR MARITIME LAWS AND DEFEND OUR COUNTRY. WE ARE, INDEED, A MULTI-MISSION OUTFIT WITH MULTI-MISSION PEOPLE. WE DO OUR JOBS WELL, AND THUS IT LOOKS EASY. HOWEVER, MANY YEARS OF HARD TRAINING AND SACRIFICE GO INTO THE MAKING OF A COAST GUARD PERSON.

YOU CANNOT BUY THE DEDICATION I HAVE SEEN OVER THE YEARS. THERE IS NO PRICE TAG FOR LAYING YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE, AND GOD FORBID THAT THERE SHOULD EVER BE A PRICE TAG ESTABLISHED. DEDICATION TO THE COAST GUARD IS A FRAME OF MIND... A FRAME OF MIND THAT IS QUANTIFIED BY LIVES SAVED, LAW BREAKERS ARRESTED, AND THE 30 PLUS BATTLE STREAMERS THAT FLY PROUDLY FROM OUR COAST GUARD FLAG.

THANKS TO THE SUPPORT THIS ADMINISTRATION AND THE CONGRESS HAVE GIVEN THE ARMED FORCES OF THIS COUNTRY, THERE IS AGAIN, THAT LITTLE EXTRA SPRING IN THE STEP OF THE MEN AND WOMEN WEARING OUR NATION'S MILITARY UNIFORMS. ONCE AGAIN THEY HAVE A LOOK OF PRIDE IN THEIR EYES. THEY KNOW THEY HAVE A PROUD HERITAGE, DESERVING OF THEIR BEST EFFORTS TO KEEP IT SO. I AM ASKING YOU TO CONTINUE TO TAKE CARE OF THEM... THEY DESERVE IT.

YOUR CONCERN AND SUPPORT WILL GUARANTEE WE WILL CONTINUE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN THE VERY BEST.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THIS CONCLUDES MY STATEMENT. I WILL BE HAPPY TO RESPOND TO ANY QUESTIONS THE COMMITTEE MAY HAVE.