

Coast Guard says it needs \$1B ‘booster shot’ to close readiness gap

By Sarah Cammarata

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The Coast Guard needs an injection of up to \$1 billion to maintain readiness levels amid continued flatline budgets, the service’s top official said Wednesday.

The maritime service needs “sustainable annual budget growth,” plus a “booster shot” of about \$900 million to \$1 billion to boost workforce numbers, Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said at the online annual Surface Navy Association National Symposium.

Schultz described [fiscal 2021](#) funding levels for the Coast Guard, which falls under the Department of Homeland Security, as only a “start.”

The head of the service also shut down the possibility of nuclear-powered icebreakers, an [idea floated by President Donald Trump](#) in a [June 2020 memo](#).

Recruitment struggles: The Coast Guard “must maintain momentum” to close the readiness gap, Schultz said.

With a 55,000-person active-duty, reserve and civilian workforce, the Coast Guard this year fell short of meeting its typical goal of 3,500 new recruits by about 1,000 service members.

“We are struggling ... we have fallen short of [that 3,500 number]. It’s a competitive environment, with a constrained topline ... there are a lot of pressures,” such as funding for [Trump’s border wall](#), among other things.

Just a start: While the [Consolidated Appropriations Act](#) helps the Coast Guard to improve child care, mental health care and housing, more investment is necessary, Schultz said.

“I’m pleased that the recent Consolidated Appropriations Act invests in our Coast Guard workforce and their families — or I should say, really starts to better invest in our workforce,” he said.

The funds have helped improve IT systems that Schultz described as being on “the brink of catastrophic failure” in [an annual address last year](#).

Nuclear option: Schultz also rejected the notion of nuclear-powered icebreakers.

“We have moved off the nuclear power breaker ... that capability, the ability to operate that in the Coast Guard, that just doesn’t exist and nor can we build out to that with all the demands on our plate,” Schultz said.

The president’s memo directed a multi-agency effort to craft a new strategy for developing a fleet of polar ice-hardened vessels and nuclear-powered icebreakers, [which only Russia has](#). That plan was never publicly released.

The commandant instead backed his oft-cited “six-three-one” strategy — six icebreakers, three of which must be heavy polar security cutters, and “we need one now.”

What’s next: The top service official set a lofty goal Wednesday of attracting 4,000 new members this year, as well as a contingent of about 500-600 reservists.

The Coast Guard plans to acquire three new polar icebreakers through its Polar Security Cutter program, with the intent to add up to three more polar icebreakers later.

The administration requested a second new icebreaker for fiscal 2021, which got the green light as part of the \$1.4 trillion government funding measure that averted a government shutdown.