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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE July 11, 2012

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FRA Hosts 14th Annual Coast Guard Caucus Breakfast

The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) hosted its 14th annual Coast Guard Caucus Breakfast Wednesday, bringing Coast Guard leaders and lawmakers together to discuss the needs of the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and its personnel. FRA hosts the event to expand awareness of the service's varied missions and tremendous service to our nation.

The Caucus is a bipartisan group of 93 lawmakers who share a common interest in the Coast Guard. Two of the Caucus co-chairs, Representatives Howard Coble (N.C.), the only USCG veteran serving in Congress and Rick Larsen (Wash.) were in attendance and were joined by other caucus members Representatives John Runyan (N.J.), Rob Wittman (Va.), Joe Wilson (S.C.) in praising the versatile, multi-mission service and calling for funding to meet USCG needs.

FRA's National President Jeffrey Gilmartin and National Executive Director Joe Barnes, Commandant of the Coast Guard Adm. Bob Papp, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Michael Leavitt, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Reserve Force Mark Allen and numerous other Coast Guard leaders also attended the gathering.

Chairman Coble indicated his appreciation for FRA hosting this annual event as it provides an opportunity to have important discussions about the increasingly important mission of the United States Coast Guard.

Admiral Papp reminded lawmakers and staff members of the challenges facing the service. He thanked FRA for continuously keeping parity a priority. Papp pointed out that the Coast Guard's value to the nation has never been greater and therefore it is essential that they recruit and retain the best possible personnel. He added that the USCG is continuously meeting and exceeding its goals for performance, recruitment and retention, and it is important to assure they have support through adequate pay, housing, education and child care offerings.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard (MCPOCG) Michael Leavitt echoed Papp's comments regarding infrastructure. "There are [also manpower] costs associated with maintaining 40-year-old ships, housing units, stations and piers. It takes time away from training and it impacts operations."

Leavitt also spoke of the needs of Coast Guard personnel and their families, citing the concerns he hears in the fleet. "The quality of our housing, particularly in remote and high-cost areas; daycare options, spouse employment and education opportunities are all related to family resiliency and are important to our members."

FRA's advocacy work focuses on compensation, health care and various quality-of-life programs that affect USCG personnel and their families. Specifically, FRA works to ensure Coast Guard pay and benefits remain on par with those enjoyed by Department of Defense personnel and that adequate funding is available to support these programs. FRA is committed to educating members of Congress, their staff and the public about the Coast Guard's critical missions as a part of the Department of Homeland Security.

About FRA

FRA is a congressionally chartered, non-profit organization representing the interests of current and former enlisted members of the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. In addition to its advocacy work on Capitol Hill, FRA also sponsors a national Americanism Essay Contest and assists its members with disaster relief grants. The Association also sponsors an Education Foundation that awards scholarships to deserving college students.

The Association recently celebrated its 87th anniversary and, as the collective voice for all Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard enlisted personnel, FRA speaks on behalf of its members on Capitol Hill. There is no law protecting military benefits, so FRA is here to stand guard.

To learn more about FRA, visit <u>www.fra.org</u>; follow us on Twitter at <u>@FRAHQ</u>; or Like us on Facebook at www.fra.org/fb.

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