COAST GUARD ACQUISITIONS

Limited Strategic Planning Efforts Pose Risk for Future Acquisitions

What GAO Found
In June 2014, GAO found that the Coast Guard lacked long-term planning to guide the affordability of its acquisition portfolio and recommended the development of a 20-year fleet modernization plan to identify all acquisitions necessary for maintaining at least its current level of service and the fiscal resources necessary to build and modernize its planned surface and aviation assets. Coast Guard officials stated that they are developing a 20-year Capital Investment Plan (CIP), but the timeframe for completion is unknown. The Coast Guard does, however, submit a 5-year CIP annually to Congress that projects acquisition funding needs for the upcoming 5 years. GAO found the CIPs do not match budget realities in that tradeoffs are not included. In the 20-year CIP, GAO would expect to see all acquisitions needed to maintain current service levels and the fiscal resources to build the identified assets as well as tradeoffs in light of funding constraints.

As GAO reported in June 2016, the Coast Guard’s heavy icebreaker fleet was operating at a reduced capacity with only one heavy polar icebreaker in service, resulting in limited access to both the Arctic and Antarctic regions year-round. The Coast Guard’s only active heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star, is approaching the end of its expected service life, and the Coast Guard plans to implement a limited service life extension to keep it operational until the new icebreaker is available. An official cost estimate has not been completed, but the Coast Guard estimates this extension will cost roughly $75 million.

What GAO Recommends
GAO is not making recommendations in this statement but has made them to the Coast Guard and DHS in the past regarding recapitalization, including that the Coast Guard develop a 20-year fleet modernization plan that identifies all acquisitions and the fiscal resources needed to acquire them. DHS agreed with this recommendation.