Coast Guard Reauthorization Passes U.S. House

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2011 yesterday. It authorizes $8.4-billion in spending for Fiscal Year 2012, and slightly more in both 2013 and 2014. It includes several provisions benefiting the Coast Guard in Alaska.

The legislation would decommission the nation's two heavy-duty icebreakers, and allow the Coast Guard to lease foreign-built ships.

The legislation would also ask the Coast Guard to report back to Congress on what it needs to expand its presence in the high arctic, such as forward operating bases, infrastructure and communications.

Under the bill, Coast Guard housing in Alaska would be scrutinized, because Young says he has had numerous complaints from service-members regarding the living conditions in the state. He wants the Coast Guard to assess current housing and prioritize their maintenance.

The last bit of language Young included in the bill would authorize the Coast Guard to transfer ownership of the decommissioned cutter Storis to a non-profit group in Juneau, which wants to turn it into a museum. Before it was retired, the Storis was the oldest ship in the fleet, having served as a light ice-breaker in World War II and several decades on patrol in Alaska. Its last base before decommissioning was Kodiak.

In other, non-Coast Guard related provisions in the bill, the Maritime Lien Reform Act would prohibit placement of maritime liens on fishing permits. Young said it would protect the livelihoods of Alaskan fishermen.