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The State of the American Maritime Industry

Testimony of

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Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate**

Good Morning Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell and members of the committee. As a mariner and maritime workforce development specialist I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on the education and workforce development successes and challenges facing the United States Jones Act impacted as well as the domestic maritime industry's workforce.

Although I am now sailing a desk as a maritime training director, I sailed many years as an Able Seaman and as Bosun. Currently I serve on two Federal Advisory Committees, representing unlicensed deck on the Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee (or MERPAC) and as a labor seat on the Marine Transportation Systems National Advisory Committee (MTSNAC). Merchant marine and maritime industry workforce issues have been my focus for the last 20 years or so.

When I caught my first ship in 1970 at the age of 18, getting my seaman's document was a relatively simple process. There were many more unlicensed entry-level positions from which to work your way up to Able Seaman or Oiler. The maritime academies supplied entry level officers and there were many who "Hawsepiped" from unlicensed mariner to officer through on the job training and US Coast Guard testing.

As you may be aware, the international treaty of 1978 known as the Standards of Training, Certifications and Watchkeeping (known as STCW) has created certain training and certification regulations which have impacted the ability of the industry to meet credentialing requirements. Since implemented in 2002, STCW has severely affected the ability of mariners to "Hawsepiped" due to these requirements. In the past, advancing from entry level positions such as Ordinary Seaman and Wiper was relatively simple by just accruing the appropriate sea time and taking a lifeboat and Able Seaman or Oiler test. This has now become a complicated and expensive journey even if you can find an entry level job on an American deep-sea vessel. As the entry positions are not USCG required billets, these positions have been drastically reduced since I first went to sea. Credentialing has even become a complex process for the domestic maritime industry such as towing and passenger vessels.

All of this is affecting our ability to support the US Navy in its mission to protect our nation. As Maritime Administrator, Admiral Busby has said, a battle group cannot stay at sea longer than a week without replenishment from the support fleet. These Military Sealift Command or government contracted civilian support vessels are manned by US Merchant Mariners of which approximately 75% are unlicensed mariners. To keep these vessels ready to serve there needs to be enough billets to provide the training platforms for entry level unlicensed mariners as well as maritime academy cadets.

They are needed to replace an aging maritime workforce of which many came up in the Viet Nam and Desert Storm eras when there were plenty of support vessels to learn your trade on.

To ensure that we have enough vessels to grow new mariners on, it is imperative that the Jones Act is protected, that the Maritime Security Program is fully funded and that USAID (also known as Food for Peace) should come from US farmers directly and carried on US vessels. Without these programs our ability to make more US mariners will be imperiled which will in turn impact our ability to support our military missions at sea.

One path to building our mariner pool is the Military to Mariner project that has been developed over the last five or six years. This has been a collaborative process that mainly took place through MERPAC. The parties involved were the US Coast Guard, US Navy, US Army, National Maritime Center, private industry and other subject matter experts. The issue that needed to be addressed was that military personnel qualifications were not accepted as equal to

the civilian US Coast guard qualifications even though the experience and training were mainly equal. Several sessions were held where military training personnel sat with National Maritime Center course approval personnel and cross-walked military PQS's with civilian competencies. In the end scores of military training programs were US Coast Guard approved as meeting the civilian standard. This will enable a military member to acquire merchant mariner credentials before separation thereby saving them time and money if they wish to go to sea as a civilian mariner. This is still an ongoing process, but the most difficult parts have been completed. Military to Mariner is still an open task at MERPAC and all parties are working to insure progress continues.

Besides our excellent Merchant Marine Academies, there are also some very good community colleges and private training providers that provide maritime training for both entry level certifications and continuing professional development.

In my home State of Washington, there has just been developed a high school Career and Technical Education curriculum for both merchant mariners and shipyard workers. These students can acquire the skills needed for entering family wage employment out of high school. This is supported by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In conclusion, considering the all challenges faced by the industry's workforce, in my opinion the most urgent is the lack of enough training platforms on our US merchant vessels. Therefor it is vital that we maintain and grow our US Jones Act fleet.