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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

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Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

John L. Mica
Ranking Republican Member

March 14, 2007

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Mr. Ron Davis, President
Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association
444 North Capitol St. NW, Ste. 800
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Davis:

This letter is to inform you that I will be introducing the Merchant Mariner Credentials Improvement Act of 2007 next week. This bill includes several provisions that were identified by shippers, labor unions, and others as ways to improve the existing credentialing process. Since you testified at the hearing that was held last year by the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation on merchant mariner credentialing, I thought you would be interested in this legislation.

The bill includes the following major provisions:

The bill removes the unnecessary and antiquated requirement that mariners swear an oath during their application for credentials.

- The bill remedies the problem of "license creep" by making all renewals effective on the date that the previous license expires.
- The bill prohibits the Coast Guard from charging a fee for any credential that is not issued within 30 days after the application is complete.

The bill prohibits the Department of Homeland Security from fingerprinting an individual separately for both the merchant mariner credential and the TWIC.

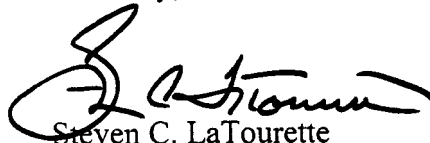
The bill allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to grant a 1-year extension on credentials to help the Coast Guard address any backlog created by the process of consolidating records at the National Maritime Center and the new requirements for physical examinations.

- The bill allows new seamen on offshore supply vessels and towing vessels to work on a temporary basis while approval of a mariner credential application is pending, but only after the Secretary determines that the worker does not pose a safety and security risk via a check of the terrorist watch list, criminal record, and a drug test.
- The bill requires a report to: (1) expand a pilot program which helped mariners complete application forms, (2) simplify the application process so that errors occur less frequently, (3) provide mariners with a notice of status of their applications, and (4) require documentation to be stored in electronic format.
- The bill requires a report on ways to address the projected future shortage in merchant mariners.
- The bill requires a report on altering Merchant Mariner Documents to make them Transportation Worker Identity Credential and International Labour Organization-compliant, including adding a biometric identifier to the card.

I look forward to working with you to continue our efforts to improve conditions for our Nation's shippers, merchant mariners and maritime workers and, particularly, to build support for this legislation so that these needed changes can be made into law.

If you have any questions about this bill or other maritime transportation issues please contact John Rayfield, the Republican Staff Director of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, at 202-226-3552.

Sincerely,



Steven C. LaTourette
Ranking Republican Member
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime
Transportation