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STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL BERNIE E. THOMPSON
CHIEF, OFFICE OF BOATING SAFETY
U. S. COAST GUARD
BEFORE THE HOUSE MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND NAVIGATION

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE.

I AM REAR ADMIRAL BERNIE E. THOMPSON, CHIEF OF THE OFFICE OF BOATING SAFETY, U. S. COAST GUARD. IT IS A PLEASURE TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU TODAY TO PRESENT THE ADMINISTRATION'S POSITION ON H. R. 4310, THE "RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY AND FACILITIES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1979".

H. R. 4310 WOULD AMEND THE FEDERAL BOAT SAFETY ACT OF 1971 TO IMPROVE RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY AND FACILITIES THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT, ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCING OF A NATIONAL BOATING SAFETY AND FACILITIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM. IT SUPERSEDES THE GRANTS TO STATES SECTIONS OF THE FEDERAL BOAT SAFETY ACT, SUBSTITUTING PROVISIONS ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL BOATING SAFETY AND FACILITIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM AND FUND COMPRISED OF A PORTION OF THE FEDERAL MARINE FUELS TAX PAID BY RECREATIONAL BOATERS. THIS FEDERAL REVENUE WOULD BE RETURNED TO THE STATES THROUGH A FORMULA GRANT TO BE MATCHED BY STATE FUNDS.

THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT BOATING IS A MAJOR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY IN THIS COUNTRY, WITH OVER 55 MILLION AMERICANS PARTICIPATING EACH YEAR. THERE IS A GREAT DIVERSITY OF BOATING ACTIVITIES ON ALL TYPES OF WATERS. BOATING HAS ENJOYED A VIRTUALLY UNINTERRUPTED GROWTH SINCE BECOMING A MAJOR FORM OF RECREATION. CONGRESS RECOGNIZED THE NEED, AND ESTABLISHED A COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL BOATING SAFETY PROGRAM, THROUGH THE FEDERAL BOAT SAFETY ACT, TO ENCOURAGE THE COOPERATIVE EFFORTS OF FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS, THE BOATING PUBLIC AND VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS, AND THE MANUFACTURING COMMUNITY. TO THE CREDIT OF THE RESULTING COOPERATIVE EFFORTS OF THESE GROUPS, THE LINE HAS BEEN HELD ON THE BOATING FATALITY RATE. THE FATALITIES PER 100,000 BOATS HAVE BEEN CUT IN HALF SINCE PASSAGE OF THE ACT.

IN OUR TESTIMONY ON THE EXTENSION OF THE STATE BOATING SAFETY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM IN FEBRUARY 1978 WE INDICATED THAT THE PROGRAM PROVIDED THE INCENTIVE TO THE STATES TO DEVELOP ACCEPTABLE BOATING SAFETY PROGRAMS, AND TO ASSUME A MAJOR SHARE OF WHAT IS LOGICALLY AND STATUTORILY A JOINT RESPONSIBILITY. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE GRANT PROVISIONS OF THE FEDERAL BOAT SAFETY ACT TO ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE BOATING SAFETY PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. WHEN RECOMMENDING THAT FEDERAL FUNDING BE PHASED OUT, WE INDICATED THAT SUFFICIENT

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STATE RESOURCES SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE BOATING SAFETY PROGRAMS. WHILE I SUSPECT THAT THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE TODAY MAY MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR SOME STATES TO RETAIN EXISTING LEVELS OF BOATING SAFETY ACTIVITIES, I FEEL THE STATES AS WELL AS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST MAKE SOME DIFFICULT PRIORITY DETERMINATIONS AS TO THE SCOPE OF SERVICES WHICH WILL BE PROVIDED TO THEIR CITIZENS.

LOOKING BROADLY AT FEDERAL RECREATION PROGRAMS, THERE IS SOME CONCERN THAT SPLITTING OFF BOATING FACILITIES FROM THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND WOULD SERVE TO FRAGMENT OUTDOOR RECREATION PLANNING AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT. THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE IN ADMINISTERING THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND HAS REGIONAL RESOURCES WORKING WITH EACH STATE TO IDENTIFY RECREATIONAL NEEDS. SETTING UP A SEPARATE ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISM IN THE COAST GUARD WOULD TO A GREAT EXTENT DUPLICATE THE ACTIVITY OF THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE, AND WOULD REQUIRE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO COORDINATE AND ADMINISTER A BOATING FACILITIES PROGRAM. IN ADDITION, ADMINISTRATION OF THE FACILITIES PROGRAM WOULD BE A NEW AREA FOR THE COAST GUARD AT A TIME WHEN WE ARE ALREADY MANAGING MANY NEW TASKS. ALSO, IT IS THE ADMINISTRATION'S POSITION THAT THE \$30 MILLION RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY AND FACILITIES IMPROVEMENT FUND WOULD ENTAIL ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW CATEGORICAL FEDERAL FUND. THIS IS NOT DESIRABLE.

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WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN NO FORMAL STUDIES REGARDING THE NEED FOR BOATING FACILITIES, THROUGH INFORMAL OBSERVATIONS AND REVIEW OF STATE, INDUSTRY, BOATING ASSOCIATION AND BOATER INFORMATION, THERE MAY BE A NEED FOR SOME ADDITIONAL FACILITIES. HOWEVER, THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE CONSIDERS THIS NEED IN DEVELOPING PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING. BOATERS ARE PAYING THE COSTS FOR THESE FACILITIES IN PROPORTION TO THEIR PARTICIPATION IN BOATING ACTIVITIES.

IN SUMMARY, WE FEEL THAT WITH THE TWO-YEAR PHASE-OUT OF THE STATE BOATING SAFETY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, THE STATES HAVE HAD SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITY TO PLAN THEIR CONTINUING BOATING SAFETY ACTIVITIES AT A LEVEL COMMENSURATE WITH THE AMOUNT OF BOATING ACTIVITIES, KNOWN SAFETY PROBLEMS, AND AVAILABLE STATE REVENUES, PRIMARILY THOSE BOATING GENERATED.

THE COAST GUARD APPRECIATES THE COMMITTEE'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE THE SAFE USE AND ENJOYMENT OF OUR NATION'S WATERS. WE WILL CONTINUE TO USE ALL MEANS WE PRESENTLY HAVE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE STATES IN PROMOTING BOATING SAFETY.

THAT, MR. CHAIRMAN, COMPLETES MY FORMAL PRESENTATION. I WILL BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE OR TO PROVIDE ANY MATERIAL DESIRED FOR THE RECORD.