

U.S. Department
of Transportation
**United States
Coast Guard**



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U.S. Coast Guard

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Final

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

U.S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN JOHN F. MCGOWAN

ON MERCHANT MARINERS FAIRNESS ACT

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMPENSATION, PENSION AND INSURANCE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 1, 1992

CAPTAIN JOHN. F. MCGOWAN
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Captain McGowan graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1969 and served aboard the USCGC TAMAROA departing as Operations Officer in 1971. He then served as Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard LORAN Station Cape Atholl, Greenland followed by duty in the Marine Safety Office San Francisco, California. He pursued a Masters program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and received the Professional Degree of Ocean Engineer as well as a Masters Degree in Shipbuilding and Shipbuilding Management. In 1976, he was assigned to the Coast Guard Merchant Marine Technical Office in New Orleans, LA. In 1980, he received orders to the Office of Merchant Marine Safety, Merchant Marine Technical Division, Coast Guard Headquarters. While at that assignment, Captain McGowan served on a variety of delegations to the International Maritime Organization including the Bulk Hazardous Chemical Sub-Committee. He was transferred to the Inspection Division of the Marine Inspection Office, New York in 1985 and finished his tour as Chief, Investigations Division. He assumed the duties as Executive Officer at the Support Center Governors Island, New York in 1987. Captain McGowan served in this capacity until receiving orders to command the Marine Safety Office, Portland, Maine in July 1989. His current assignment is Chief, Merchant Vessel Personnel Division, Office of Marine Safety, Security and Environmental Protection, Coast Guard Headquarters.

Captain McGowan is a Registered Professional Engineer and an active member of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, the Coast Guard Academy and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Alumni Associations.

Captain McGowan has been awarded the Coast Guard Meritorious Service Medal, the Coast Guard Commendation Medal (three awards), the Coast Guard Achievement Medal, the Coast Guard Commandant Letter of Commendation Ribbon, the Coast Guard Unit Commendation Ribbon and the Coast Guard Special Operations Service Ribbon. Captain McGowan formed the Maine and New Hampshire Port Safety Forum which received the Gulf of Maine Visionary Award for 1991. The Forum was again recognized in 1992 by the President's Council on Management Improvement. MSO Portland became the first Coast Guard and Department of Transportation unit to receive the Council's award for Management Excellence. Captain McGowan was named the 1992 Maritime Person of the Year by the Propeller Club of the Port of Portland.

Captain McGowan and his wife, Hennie, are from Connecticut and the parents of five children. They currently live in Virginia.

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I am Captain John F. McGowan, U.S. Coast Guard, Chief, Merchant Vessel Personnel Division, Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC. Thank you for this opportunity to address you today on the Merchant Mariners Fairness Act of 1991, H.R. 44.

My responsibilities include establishing qualification standards for licensing and certification of merchant seamen, setting minimum manning requirements for U.S. vessels, and establishing pilotage requirements. Additionally, I am the custodian of merchant seamen's records.

On January 19, 1988, then Secretary of the Air Force Aldredge determined that certain merchant mariners who served our country during World War II are eligible for veteran status under the provisions of Public Law 95-202. As the agency with custody of merchant seamen's records, the Coast Guard was charged with the responsibility of processing the applications and making a determination of each individual's eligibility.

A staff element of 20 people was initially established to handle this project. It became evident early on that a staff of this size would be inadequate to complete the task. Then Secretary of Transportation Burnley detailed 50 people to this project from other agencies in the department. Admiral Yost, Commandant of the Coast Guard at that time, ordered an additional 50 Coast Guard personnel to be temporarily transferred to Washington to support this program. With these, and other people, a 300-person temporary task force was formed in August 1988 to eliminate the massive backlog of cases that had developed. The backlog was reduced from 48,000 to 16,000 applications by working two shifts each work day, and one shift on Saturdays and Sundays.

The task force was reduced in size and, in February 1989, a separate branch of 60 people within the Merchant Vessel Personnel Division at Coast Guard Headquarters was created to continue processing applications. This office is called the Merchant Marine Veterans Branch. As the number of applications being received each month has dropped, so too has the size of the branch. It is now staffed by nine military and civilian personnel in temporary positions that are scheduled to expire on March 1, 1993. Enactment of H.R. 44 would directly impact the status of this branch and future Coast Guard budgeting considerations.

were unaware of their eligibility. Therefore, the response could approach as many as 50,000 new applications for discharges and requests for amended discharges.

This concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer your questions at this time.