

U.S. Department
of Transportation

United States
Coast Guard



United States Coast Guard
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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF

COMMODORE EVERETTE L. TUCKER, JR.

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD

AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 19, 1997

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Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet with you and the other distinguished members of this Subcommittee and to represent the approximately 34,000 men and women volunteers of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

For the last two years, Commodore Peter Melera, my predecessor asked for your support in gaining passage of legislation to amend the laws relating to the Coast Guard Auxiliary. As you know, these were passed and enacted into law late last year. The members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary greatly appreciate your support that will enhance the Auxiliary's service to the nation.

This legislation grants the Commandant broad authority in using the Auxiliary, while providing adequate liability protection to our members during the performance of these duties. It allows the Auxiliary's resources to be used as a force-multiplier to perform ongoing missions, as well as meet surge requirements resulting from natural disasters, environmental catastrophes, and major marine accidents. It also provides for a trained and ready force to augment Coast Guard units in the U.S. and its territories to backfill shortages during deployment of Coast Guard forces in support of military operations.

Since the passage of this legislation, the Auxiliary has moved aggressively to support the Coast Guard's goal of eliminating environmental damage and natural resource degradation associated with maritime transportation, fishing, and recreational boating.

We have created a new staff organization, the Department of Marine Safety and Environmental Protection. It will work closely with the Coast Guard and our field units in developing and implementing programs that will assist the Coast Guard in communications, safety and security patrols, remote area inspections, vessel factory visits, licensing exam administration, spill reconnaissance and sampling, small commercial vessel safety, and public affairs. We have recently conducted a course to certify Auxiliary instructors for the Sea Partners Course, a marine environmental outreach education program, for presentation in schools throughout the nation.

Over the past several years, Auxiliarists have promoted fishing vessel safety by offering voluntary dockside commercial fishing vessel examinations. Currently, a pilot project is underway to develop a similar program for charter fishing vessels.

In 1996, Auxiliarists provided approximately 5,900 operational vessels, 133 aircraft, and 2,200 radio stations to support various Coast Guard missions, as well as other federal agency and state requested missions. We work side-by-side with members of these organizations in accomplishing these missions. An excellent example of this occurred less than two weeks ago, when over 60 Auxiliarists from the Eighth Coast Guard District were called out to support the emergency flood response operation along the Ohio River and to assist in watchstanding at the State of Ohio Emergency Operations Center. The ability of the Auxiliary to quickly provide trained personnel during contingency or surge operational periods helps ensure the availability of active duty Coast Guard resources to meet other mission requirements.

1996 was a very busy year for the Auxiliary. In support of the Coast Guard goal to eliminate deaths, injuries, and property damage associated with maritime transportation, fishing, and recreational boating, we provided a trained force of 10,251 instructors to teach boating safety courses. Also, we provided over 7,800 vessel examiners, who perform voluntary safety examinations on recreational vessels, and almost 16,000 boat crew and coxswains who provide safety patrols, search and rescue, and other maritime

support missions. In addition, over 350 Auxiliary pilots and 600 air observers supported various Coast Guard missions.

Last year, the Auxiliary instructed over 550,000 students in boating safety classes, including more than 228,000 youths. A new one-lesson personal watercraft course was developed to improve the safe operation of these craft, a high percentage of which are operated by teenagers. A new course, "The Skipper's Course," designed as a non-classroom course, was made available to boaters who do not have the time to take a regular course. We also utilize the "PFD Panda" program, developed by the State of Minnesota. This program encourages children to wear personal floatation devices and has been credited with saving the lives of small children on boats.

We conducted courtesy safety examinations on more than 175,000 recreational boats, including personal watercraft. Currently scheduled for fielding in 1997 is a new program targeting the safety of rental personal watercraft. The voluntary dockside commercial fishing vessel safety examination program continued to enhance safety in this historically dangerous line of work. We also conducted on both navigable and sole state waters more than 33,500 safety, regatta, and aids to navigation patrols and more than 38,000 operational support missions. The Auxiliary was on scene in the water and in the air at the Olympics in Savannah and outside Atlanta, Georgia, ensuring safety and security. Coast Guard Auxiliarists responded quickly to support land, water and air missions during the TWA Flight 800 disaster last summer. The more than 460,000 hours spent by Auxiliarists patrolling our nation's waterways last year resulted in 484 lives saved, 14,581 persons assisted, and over \$350 million worth of property assisted or saved.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary is an extremely cost-effective resource for the Coast Guard. The Auxiliary's efforts have made a major contribution to the downward trend in fatalities as well as prevented the costs associated with Coast Guard and state prosecuted SAR cases.

Today's Auxiliary is proud to be part of "Team Coast Guard." We believe that we are now positioned to continue our service to the Coast Guard and the nation into the 21st century. We note with pride our 58 years of service and look forward to the challenges and opportunities that we will face in the future.

I will be happy to answer any questions which you or the other members of the Subcommittee might have.