

Coast Guard Authorization Bill Approved by House Committee

MAY 25, 2017

On May 24, 2017, the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2017, H.R. 2518. That bill, like other Coast Guard authorization legislation, seeks to make maritime policy changes in addition to authorizing Coast Guard functions. A similar bill, S. 1129, was approved by the Senate Commerce Committee on May 18. The bill includes:

- A codification and clean-up of the Port and Waterways Safety Act, which is a long-standing law governing vessels in U.S. waters, granting the U.S. Coast Guard certain authority over such vessels and requiring vessels to meet safety, communications and other requirements;
- The creation of an alternative safety compliance program in lieu of current enumerated safety requirements for fishing vessels, fish processing vessels or fish tender vessels at least 50 feet in over length built before July 1, 2013, and 25 years old or older;
- Authorization to establish a performance standard for distress signals for vessels in lieu of existing requirements;
- Authorization to make recreational boat endorsements effective for five years versus the current annual endorsements (recreational boaters have complained of processing backlogs that make annual renewals difficult); and
- Several studies including an analysis of the costs of fishing vessel classification requirements, the use of unmanned technologies for maritime domain awareness and the costs of third party inspections required for towing vessels.

The Committee also approved a handful of amendments (not reflected in the accompanying document which shows the bill as introduced before Committee action) including a grant of Jones Act privileges to the newly constructed fishing vessel *America's Finest* which was apparently constructed with at least one major foreign component jeopardizing its right to be considered "U.S.-built" (which is a prerequisite for fishing in U.S. waters).

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