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OMSA Calls on Congress to End Regulatory Disparities Hurting U.S.-Flagged Vessels

Restated Marine Safety Mission and New Civilian Secretary of the Coast Guard proposed as solutions

WASHINGTON — During a House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation roundtable held on July 21, [Offshore Marine Service Association](#) (OMSA) President and CEO Aaron Smith urged Congress to modernize the U.S. Coast Guard's statutory Marine Safety mission to ensure the agency considers the impact of its regulations and policies on the competitiveness of the U.S. maritime industry.

In both his [written](#) and [verbal](#) testimony, Smith emphasized that OMSA supports strong safety, environmental, and cybersecurity standards, but argued those standards must be applied consistently to both U.S.- and foreign-flag vessels operating in the same waters.

"All too often, U.S. Coast Guard regulation and policy are applied only to U.S.-flagged vessels," Smith testified. "These policies and regulations differ from and are almost always more stringent than the requirements placed on the foreign-flagged vessels that OMSA members compete with."

Smith highlighted several examples where Coast Guard regulations have created competitive disadvantages for U.S.-flagged vessels. One specific example Smith mentioned was a statutory requirement included as part of the Safer Seas Act that required U.S. vessels and foreign-flagged vessels include cameras outside crew berthing areas. Smith explained how the Coast Guard is only enforcing this expensive requirement on U.S.-flagged vessels while letting foreign-flagged vessels ignore the law.



Smith speaking at July 21 Roundtable

He urged lawmakers to recognize these regulatory disparities extend beyond vessel owners, impacting American mariners, domestic shipyards, shoreside businesses, offshore energy development, and the nation's long-term maritime and national security capabilities.

"OMSA believes there is a solution to this problem, and it is not increased resources. Instead, there must be a restatement of the statutory Marine Safety mission of the USCG. Specifically, this restatement must clarify that the USCG is required to consider the effect on the U.S. maritime industry whenever it issues, interprets, or implements regulations or policies," Smith stated.

To address these concerns, Smith called on Congress to amend the Coast Guard's statutory Marine Safety mission to require the agency to consider the effects of its regulations and policies on the U.S. maritime industry alongside its responsibility to promote safety. He also recommended establishing a civilian Secretary of the Coast Guard to provide greater oversight, accountability, and consistency in the implementation of national regulatory policy.

"A restated Marine Safety mission and the establishment of a Secretary of the Coast Guard are vital changes necessary to ensure that the U.S. maritime industry grows and to fulfill the national policy of being a national, homeland, and economic security driver," Smith concluded. "We look forward to working with the Committee to make these changes a reality so that the efforts to promote the U.S. maritime industry are not inadvertently hindered by the USCG's good faith efforts to provide for safety."

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*The **Offshore Marine Service Association (OMSA)** OMSA is the advocate for the offshore marine transportation service industry in the United States. The Association represents 170-member companies and their 12,000 U.S. employees based throughout the U.S.*