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July 20, 2006

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## **AWO Testifies Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation on U.S. Coast Guard Licensing and Documentation of U.S. Merchant Mariners**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Testifying today on behalf of the American Waterways Operators (AWO) before a hearing of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation, AWO Chairman Dale Sause, President of Sause Bros., headquartered in Coos Bay, OR, outlined AWO's efforts to improve Coast Guard licensing and the proposed Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC).

In his testimony, Sause asserted that, "the current state of mariner licensing -- with lengthy delays and burdensome requirements on the mariners themselves -- is exacerbating an already difficult personnel shortage situation facing the maritime industry." Outlining the difficulties that AWO members are experiencing as their crews engage the Coast Guard licensing process, Sause summarized three areas from which the problems stem: 1) The processes used in the Regional Exam Centers (RECs) force the industry to endure long and chronic backlogs; 2) The technology used by RECs is viewed by many as antiquated, compounding delays and backlogs; and, 3) Medical issues frequently prolong application processing time.

"The current licensing process is in dire need of better processes, better technology, better staffing and a more uniform application of licensing requirements and medical standards," Sause told the committee. Sause noted that, "The Coast Guard has begun to implement a plan to consolidate the processing of licensees in one national center. This overhaul has been a long time coming, and AWO is pleased that the agency is finally moving forward to implement these needed changes."

Continuing his testimony, Sause also commended the Coast Guard for issuing a notice of proposed rulemaking that would consolidate and streamline the process for obtaining a merchant mariner credential. "AWO believes that many of the features of the proposed rule will have a positive impact on the licensing system. This rulemaking is a step in the right direction," Sause said.

Sause made recommendations for the Coast Guard testifying that, "The Coast Guard should move quickly to make common-sense changes to the licensing regulations for towing vessel officers, as recommended by the Towing Safety Advisory Committee," as well as address the issue of "license creep."

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**The American Waterways Operators**

Finally, the testimony addressed the new TWIC proposal. "AWO has characterized it as a blunt instrument that will impose substantial hardships on mariners and the companies that employ them," Sause said. AWO proposes that the final rule include an interim work provision for new hires, allowing new employees to work aboard a vessel on a probationary basis until the TWIC application is granted.

Concluding the testimony, Sause stated, "AWO and its member companies stand ready to work with this committee and with the Coast Guard to ensure high standards of safety and security while keeping mariners working, vessels moving, and the commerce of the United States flowing."

Copies of the testimony are available on AWO's Web site,  
[http://www.americanwaterways.com/press\\_room/news\\_releases/legislative\\_news/index.html](http://www.americanwaterways.com/press_room/news_releases/legislative_news/index.html).

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