

For Immediate Release
April 18, 2016

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**American Waterways Operators President Testifies Before Congressional Subcommittee:
*Urges Support for Jones Act and Strong Vessel Discharge Reform Legislation***

ARLINGTON, VA – On April 14, in testimony before the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Tom Allegretti, President & CEO of The American Waterways Operators, praised the Subcommittee’s strong leadership in supporting the Jones Act, while urging the Representatives not to allow the law to be weakened by legislation arising from other committees. As an example, Mr. Allegretti cited a bill under development in the Natural Resources Committee to provide economic relief for Puerto Rico.

The Jones Act supports a stable, high-performing and highly competitive domestic maritime industry. More than 40,000 American-built vessels move vital cargoes on the nation’s inland rivers and along the coasts. The industry generates \$100 billion in annual economic output. Mr. Allegretti said the Jones Act is vital to U.S. homeland security, describing the U.S.-flag vessels as an “indispensable part” of the nation’s domestic defense network.

Mr. Allegretti also urged the Committee to support a uniform national standard for ballast water and other vessel discharges to end a patchwork of federal and state regulations that is counterproductive to enhanced environmental protection, confusing and costly for vessel owners and inefficient for state and federal agencies. He called on Congress to pass H.R. 980, the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act.

“Now is the time for Congress to resolve this regulatory mess by enacting legislation that will enhance protections for the waterways, boost efforts to develop improved ballast water treatment technologies, and eliminate uncertainty that stymies investment. H.R. 980 is a solid, bipartisan compromise that would replace the current unworkable regulatory patchwork with one set of scientifically based, environmentally protective and technologically achievable rules,” Mr. Allegretti said.

He also asked the Subcommittee to support the Coast Guard’s role as the preeminent federal regulatory authority over navigation and vessel operations and oppose state attempts to encroach on the Coast Guard’s authority. Additionally, he requested that the Subcommittee exercise oversight of the implementation of the forthcoming towing vessel inspection rule so that it achieves its goals of improved safety and causes no disruption to the delivery of critical cargoes.

The American Waterways Operators is the national trade association representing the tugboat, towboat and barge industry which operates along the rivers, coasts, Great Lakes and harbors of the United States. Barge transportation serves the nation as the safest, most environmentally friendly and most economical mode of freight transportation. For more information about AWO, please visit www.americanwaterways.com.