

For Immediate Release
April 2, 2014

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Nation's Tugboat, Towboat and Barge Industry to Visit 150 Congressional Offices, Urging Action on Waterways Infrastructure, Vessel Discharges Legislation

ARLINGTON, VA – As part of the American Waterways Operators' annual Barge-In, U.S. vessel owners, operators and mariners are fanning out all over Capitol Hill today visiting nearly 150 Congressional offices to talk about the industry's top advocacy priorities and the industry's important role as economic generators, safety leaders and environmental stewards.

The group's top advocacy priorities this year include: ensuring final passage of needed water resources development legislation; garnering support for a uniform national federal framework for the regulation of ballast water and other vessel discharges; preservation of the Jones Act as the foundation of the vital and vibrant domestic maritime industry; and pressing for balanced, science-based solutions that maintain the essential flow of waterborne commerce while thwarting the spread of invasive species.

"This year's Barge-In is our largest event to date, and I believe this is due to the urgent issues that are facing our industry and our country," said Tom Allegretti, AWO President & CEO. He noted that AWO members are urging the House and Senate to wrap up WRDA, pointing to the necessity of a modern, well-maintained lock and dam infrastructure upon which safe and efficient waterborne commerce, as well as U.S. competitiveness, heavily depends.

Mr. Allegretti also called attention to the solid bipartisan Senate support of S. 2094, a bill that would provide a uniform national framework regulating ballast water and other vessel discharges. "With over one-quarter of the Senate behind this bill, as well as a diverse coalition of 63 stakeholder organizations, we hope that Senate will act quickly to end a regulatory patchwork that is confusing and costly for vessel owners and mariners, delays investments in environmentally protective ballast water treatment technologies, and forces federal and state agencies to expend time and taxpayer money on duplicative efforts," he said.

Regarding invasive species, particularly Asian Carp and calls for physical separation of Lake Michigan from the Mississippi River, Mr. Allegretti called attention to the need to work with all stakeholders to find science-based, practical, and cost-effective pathways to protecting the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River system without adversely affecting waterborne commerce.

In addition to discussing specific priorities with their elected officials, Mr. Allegretti said that AWO members continue to raise the profile of the tugboat, towboat and barge industry as well as that of the domestic maritime fleet, which is supported by the Jones Act, a longstanding law requiring that U.S. domestic waterborne commerce be carried on U.S.-flagged vessels built in U.S. shipyards and owned and crewed by American citizens. The Jones Act, Mr. Allegretti noted, is a tremendous economic generator for the national economy and a necessary law that also supports U.S. national and homeland security.

"AWO members work hard every day to move the nation's cargo safely and efficiently," Mr. Allegretti said. "This is an industry that is providing family-wage jobs to tens of thousands of American workers and doing its best to advance as leaders in safety and environmental stewardship. We want Congress to understand how essential this industry is to our quality of life, to our economy, and to enhancing safety on the nation's waterways."