STATEMENT BY

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Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
United States House of Representatives

COAST GUARD ICEBREAKERS

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Lake Carriers' Association represents 16 American corporations that operate 63 U.S.-Flag vessels exclusively on the Great Lakes. These vessels ("Lakers") move the raw materials that drive the U.S. economy: iron ore for steel production, coal for power generation, limestone and cement for the construction industry, …. When high water levels offset the lack of adequate dredging on the Great Lakes, LCA's members can move more than 115 million tons of cargo in a given year.

Great Lakes Maritime Task Force represents more than 80 organizations, including dock operators, labor unions, vessel operators, steel producers, power generators, port authorities, dredging contractors, and limestone producers. Founded in 1992, it promotes Great Lakes Marine Transportation.

Every day the 2,500 professional American mariners sailing on the Great Lakes risk their lives and their livelihoods to feed the economic engine that drives the North American Heartland. They deserve the respect and the resources needed to ensure safe and efficient passage. Without adequate U.S. Coast Guard resources, particularly icebreaking capacity, the gears of this economic engine could come to a grinding halt. As President of Lake Carriers' Association and a Vice President of Great Lakes Maritime Task Force, I have the privilege of testifying on behalf of those mariners and the U.S.-Flag vessels operating on the Great Lakes. With each cargo, we deliver iron ore for steel production, limestone and cement for construction, coal for power generation … and jobs.

Three days after the 9/11 attack, I was recalled to active duty and served for a year at the Ninth Coast Guard District Headquarters in Cleveland. I recently retired as a United States Coast Guard Officer with more than 23 years of combined active duty and reserve service. For sixteen of those years, I served on the Great Lakes and I can tell you, without a doubt, that some of the active sailors, reservists, and civilians working at Great Lakes Commands are among the most dedicated public servants you will ever meet. There is, however, one aspect of their job that no amount of talent and dedication can overcome: a lack of appropriate resources. Sailors need ships.

Since 2004, Lake Carriers' Association has strongly advocated for additional deep-draft icebreaking and ice-capable U.S. Coast Guard vessels for the Great Lakes. Our requests (and prayers) have gone unanswered. We need one additional 140-foot-long Icebreaking Tug (WTGB) assigned to Duluth, Minnesota, to support operations on Lake Superior and an additional ice-strengthened 225-foot-long Seagoing Buoy Tender (WLB) assigned to Charlevoix, Michigan, to support operations on Lake Michigan and the Straits of Mackinac. I have attached copies of our correspondence with the U.S. Coast Guard for the record. Thank you for allowing me to make our case before this Subcommittee.

Just as America's northern interstates and roadways need to be plowed in the winter to facilitate traffic, our waterways need sufficient assets to remain conduits for waterborne commerce. Just as our cities and states use a mix of snowplows and police cruisers to serve the public and the public good, our U.S. Coast Guard uses a mix of vessels designed with a primary purpose, yet capable of multiple missions.

We need to make sure sufficient nautical snowplows are stationed where the snow and ice are, and ensure there are enough waterborne squad cars to provide maritime security when and where it is needed.

The Great Lakes form a marine highway on which moves as much as 200 million tons of cargo a year, when water levels and economic conditions allow. 66 U.S.-Flag Lakers moved 104 million tons in 2007; of that total, 15 million tons – or 14% – were delivered between December 15th and April 15th; this timeframe is generally considered the "ice season." Valued at $1.1 billion, the majority of that cargo moved before the Locks at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, closed on January 15th and after it reopened on March 25th. Some cargo will continue to move on the Lower Lakes, but after the Welland Canal closes at the end of December, the Great Lakes become a closed system — and Lake Superior becomes a closed system within a closed system. Some areas are considered "critical waterways": Whitefish Bay, the St. Marys River, the Straits of Mackinac, and the Detroit/St. Clair River system. The eight U.S. Coast Guard vessels and two Canadian Coast Guard vessels provide icebreaking services in those areas and others, as resources allow. Much like driveways and private roads, docks and "non-critical" waterways often receive icebreaking services from commercial providers

The winter of 2007-2008 was considered "normal" when compared to the past thirty winters. It was, nonetheless, the most severe winter we've experienced since 2003. It clearly demonstrated the abysmal impact a lack of icebreaking resources can have on our industry. Due to a lack of capacity, capability, and reliability by both the U.S. and Canadian Coast Guards, much of the Great Lakes and Connecting Channels remained abandoned to the elements. The price tag for just three Lake Carriers' Association members exceeded $1.3 million in vessel damages. Lives were unnecessarily risked when the U.S. Coast Guard failed, because of inadequate resources, to answer the call.

I would like to briefly compare and contrast the distribution of U.S. Coast Guard vessels 65 feet and greater in length on Lake Michigan with the East Coast of the United States. Lake Michigan is 307 miles long and 118 miles wide; it encompasses more than 67,900 square miles and is as deep as 923 feet. It boasts more than 1,640 miles of coastline. 1,640 miles is the distance from Portland, Maine, to Homestead, Florida (just south of Miami). Currently, the Lake is home to one 140-foot-long Icebreaking Tug (USCGC Mobile Bay, homeported in Green Bay, Wisconsin) and its attached buoy tending barge. The equivalent shoreline of the East Coast has 90 U.S. Coast Guard vessels homeported along it.

A U.S. Coast Guard representative once informed me that six Coast Guard vessels provide icebreaking services for a 150-mile stretch of the Hudson River. By contrast, on the Great Lakes we have six icebreakers (USCGC Mackinaw and five WTGBs) and two "ice strengthened" buoy tenders (225-foot-long WLBs) for the entire Great Lakes. I certainly understand the need for icebreaking on the Hudson River and other Coast Guard missions on the East Coast. To be clear, I am not asking for parity, I am seeking equity.

The attached graph illustrates that the U.S. Coast Guard uses its icebreakers on the East Coast primarily for security missions. I believe this is not the best resource for the job. It is the nautical equivalent of putting a blue light on a snowplow. It can be done, but it is not the best allocation of resources for traffic management or for law enforcement. The U.S. Coast Guard also keeps a 140-foot-long icebreaker stationed at its Academy for use as a training platform. Again, I don't mean to diminish the importance of the mission, but rather question the asset allocation.

The graph details the average number of hours spent by an East Coast Icebreaking Tug (140-foot WTGB) and one homeported on the Great Lakes. First District vessels (East Coast), for example, will spend an estimated 157 hours breaking ice compared to 870 hours for the Great Lakes 140-foot-long WTGBs. Contrast the 101 hours the Great Lakes vessels will spend on security with the 900 hours conducted by the average First District icebreaker.

Historically, there were as many as five 180-foot-long buoy tenders stationed on the Great Lakes; as recently as 2006, there were three. Those three have since been replaced with two 225s. Some in the U.S. Coast Guard have argued the 225-foot-long class of vessel is of higher horsepower and more efficient. This argument ignores the fact that there is a natural tension between icebreaking and buoy tending. Buoys are pulled as the ice season begins and need to be reset as the need for icebreaking ends. Vessels can't perform both missions at the same time. I must also point out that even though the 225s may have a higher horsepower, they can't use it in the ice because they are not built as structurally sound as the 180-foot class. In fact, the two 225s on the Great Lakes had to be reinforced in the bow and still remain reined in. The 225s also have proven to be the most unreliable vessels in the Coast Guard fleet. They are prone to leaking oil from their propellers and other engineering failures. These repairs are being made during critical icebreaking operations, and have required dry-docking outside of the Lakes. More operational days have been lost by the aging 140-foot-long fleet and the unreliable 225-foot-long fleet than anyone could have imagined.

I appreciate the difficult decisions U.S. Coast Guard policymakers and resource allocators have to make — particularly in today's resource constrained, yet demanding operational environment. A better understanding of the operational environment on the Great Lakes and our mission needs by those decisionmakers and their Congressional oversight committee could result in a better geographical distribution of icebreakers and a better allocation of vessels based on mission requirements and vessel performance parameters. Providing the Great Lakes with one additional 140-foot-long Icebreaking Tug and one additional 225-foot-long Seagoing Buoy Tender would have a tremendous impact on the Great Lakes shipping industry's ability to meet the needs of commerce and would not hinder the U.S. Coast Guard's ability to perform its mission in the rest of the United States. Let me emphasize again, I am not asking for parity, but believe there should be more equity. There needs to be a better geographical distribution of icebreakers and a better allocation of vessels, based on mission requirements and vessel performance parameters.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this hearing. I will do my best to answer any questions you might have.

Attachments:

- U.S. Coast Guard Correspondence
  - (A) 04/06/2004 – Lake Carriers' Association Letter to VADM James D. Hull, Commander-Atlantic Region, USCG
  - (B) 07/09/2004 – VADM James D. Hull, Commander-Atlantic Region, USCG Letter to Lake Carriers' Association
  - (C) 10/03/2005 – VADM V.S. Crea, Commander-Atlantic Region, USCG Letter to Mayor Norman L. Carlson, Jr. (Charlevoix, MI)
  - (D) 10/12/2005 – J.X. Monaghan, Chief-Office of Cutter Forces, by Direction of ADM Collins, Commandant, USCG Letter to Mayor Carlson
  - (E) 10/19/2005 – RADM Robert J. Papp, Jr., Commander-Ninth Coast Guard District, Letter to Mayor Carlson
  - (F) 11/04/2005 – Lake Carriers' Association Letter to Admiral Thomas H. Collins, Commandant, USCG
  - (G) 12/30/2005 – VADM Terry M. Cross, Acting Commandant, USCG, Letter to Lake Carriers' Association
- (H) Lake Michigan USCG Vessel Asset Comparison
- (I) Graph: Average WTGB Vessel Usage
- (J) PowerPoint Presentation