

**MEETING OF THE U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY  
BOARD OF VISITORS  
FRIDAY, 13 MAY 2022  
HYBRID MEETING: USMMA/VIRTUAL**

**ATTENDEES:**

BOARD OF VISITORS MEMBERS: Representative Tom Suozzi (NY), Representative Salud Carbajal (CA), Representative Mikie Sherrill (NJ), Representative Jack Bergman (MI), Jennifer Boykin, Eugene Lutz, Francis Brooke, Stephen Carmel, RADM Michael Wettlaufer, VADM Scott Buschman, Dr. Henry Marcus

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (DOT), MARITIME ADMINISTRATION (MARAD), AND U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY (USMMA/ACADEMY) OFFICIALS: VADM Jack Buono (Superintendent), RDML Sue Dunlap (Deputy Superintendent), Acting Maritime Administrator/Deputy Maritime Administrator Lucinda Lessley, MARAD Chief Counsel Tamekia Flack, MARAD Executive Director Jack Kammerer, MARAD Deputy Associate Administrator and National Coordinator of Maritime Education Dr. Sashi Kumar, MARAD Chief Financial Officer Dr. Corey Beckett, George Rhynedance (MARAD Academy Liaison and Board of Visitors Designated Federal Officer (DFO)), Brooke Brzozowske (MARAD Office of Public Affairs), and Kristen Amarosa (MARAD Office of Congressional Affairs)

**PURPOSE:**

To brief the Board of Visitors (Board) on the state of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

**OPENING REMARKS:**

Representative Suozzi opened the meeting shortly after 10 a.m. by expressing his frustration with the Charter having expired in October and the difficulty with getting money for Academy infrastructure. He discussed how he represents the voices of a lot of people at the table and joining virtually because they all care deeply about the Academy. He indicated nothing can be solved without proper attention. He turned his focus to the itinerary by stating we had much to accomplish, and the first thing would be approving the minutes from the last meeting (which had been distributed to the members prior to the meeting).

Representative Suozzi then made a special mention of Representative Carbajal because he had encouraged him to be appointed as a member of the Board of Visitors, since he serves on the House Armed Services Committee, and, more importantly, chairs the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation. Representative Suozzi thanked Representative Carbajal (who attended in person), and Representative Mikie Sherrill and Representative Bergman (who attended virtually).

Representative Suozzi took a roll call, and then officially convened the meeting by moving to adopt the minutes from the previous meeting (which has taken place virtually on September 16, 2020). All members voted aye.

Representative Suozzi thanked everyone and welcomed the new members who are joining the Board of Visitors. He indicated those in attendance would be given a chance to make remarks later if they would like to do so. He explained there was a very full meeting agenda today with a hard stop at three o'clock, so he was going to try and keep the meeting very tight.

#### **REPORT:**

The next item on the agenda was the submission of a report of the board's deliberations to the President of the United States within 60 days of this meeting. Representative Suozzi asked that George Rhynedance (DFO) and Kristen Amarosa work along with his staff and hopefully, the new vice chairman, to help craft that report, and to identify a chairman from the Senate to try and prepare this report. Representative Suozzi indicated he wanted to see the report and offer it to all the Board members for review. George Rhynedance indicated that staff would ensure this occurred.

#### **NEXT MEETING:**

The next agenda item was to set a second meeting. Representative Suozzi said that many people were upset that the current meeting was occurring so late and that a Senator had not yet been identified to serve as the chair of the board.

Representative Suozzi requested to set another meeting for December 2022 after midterm elections (during the first week of December if possible), but asked George Rhynedance to poll the Board members for dates. He indicated that the meeting in December should be a virtual meeting. He then polled the Board members for any comments about setting this virtual meeting in December. No comments or objections were offered.

#### **CHARTER:**

Representative Suozzi then moved onto the next item on the agenda: the Charter. He indicated that the Parents' Association had brought to his attention two changes that had been made in the revised Charter filed March 30, 2022.

- 1) In the version of the Charter that was previously in effect (dated October 25, 2019), the following statement had been included: "the DFO, in consultation with the chair, select the date for the meeting." Representative Suozzi indicated that he would like that language to be placed back into the charter. He then asked for the board to support this reversion to the previous language.
- 2) Representative Suozzi also stated that the revised Charter excluded language that had been included in the previous 2019 version of the Charter stating that the Board will submit a report to the President. He requested that the Charter be amended to include this language from the 2019 Charter.

Representative Suozzi requested a vote to approve amending the Charter with these edits. Steve Carmel stated that he wanted the 2017 version of the Charter reinstated. He indicated the 2017 charter had stated that there would be three annual meetings instead of the two provided in the revised Charter. Mr. Carmel also stated that he preferred the reporting structure provided in the 2017 Charter. He stated that the power of the Board was diminished considerably overall in the revised Charter, whereas the 2017 charter better preserved the ability of the Board to oversee the functioning of the Academy.

Tamekia Flack (MARAD Chief Counsel) was asked by Representative Suozzi to explain that there had also been a 2019 Charter.

Representative Suozzi recommended that the Board adopt the amendments he had proposed at this meeting now. He also asked the Board to articulate what their concerns about the charter were other than these two items that he had pointed out.

Mr. Lutz explained his concerns about the reporting structure and added that he was concerned that the number of meetings had been reduced from three to two. He noted that with everything going on at USMMA, more would be better, and he agreed the Charter should provide for three meetings.

Ms. Boykin stated she also agreed that the Charter should provide for three meetings.

Representative Suozzi asked for any additional comments. RADM Wettlaufer stated he too agreed that the Charter should provide for three annual meetings and stated that the 2017 charter aligns with the legislation that established the Board, but he was not sure that the most recent edits align with the establishing legislation.

Representative Carbajal suggested amending the Charter to say, "no less than two meetings so they could have three meetings."

Representative Suozzi asked whether amending the Charter to say no less than two meetings would address Board members' concerns.

Ms. Boykin responded that this would not address the concerns. She stated that the Charter should provide for three annual meetings at a minimum and that the Board might need to meet more frequently. She stated that the Board has a lot of work to do, and the Board needs to be present.

Mr. Carmel mentioned that the 2017 charter might be the last one that had actually been voted on by the Board. He explained there may have been another Charter circulated subsequently but that the 2017 Charter is the last one that has been voted on.

Representative Suozzi called on Ms. Flack to provide any information about the changes in the Charter from 2017 to 2019 to 2022. Ms. Flack recommended that the Board identify all the changes that they would like to see recommended as changes within the Charter and present them to MARAD so that MARAD can consider them.

Mr. Lutz asked why the Charter goes back to MARAD.

Ms. Flack responded that the Board belongs to MARAD and the Department of Transportation. There were questions from the members about the independence of the Board's operations.

Representative Suozzi acknowledged that a lot of distrust had been generated by some of the members of the Board and from members of the community at large and it was important to be thinking about things the Board is trying to accomplish. He had no objection to having three meetings instead of two meetings. He indicated he was happy to be having the current meeting.

Mr. Lutz explained what is most important is that the power of the Board should rest in the Board and not with MARAD so that the Board is independent.

Representative Suozzi respectfully asked that in order to move forward with business here today, the Board adopt three amendments to the proposed Charter:

- 1) DFO select the date of the next meeting in consultation with the Chair;
- 2) Board shall report to the President; and
- 3) Board shall have three annual meetings instead of two.

Representative Suozzi recommended that they adopt the 2022 Charter with the three edits that he enumerated previously. He stated that if the Board wanted to make changes in the future, it could be done when people are prepared to articulate the changes they want to make. He motioned that the Charter will be amended to include the three proposed amendments:

Representative Suozzi asked for a second.

Ms. Boykin seconded his motion.

Representative Suozzi motioned to adopt the Charter as amended and asked for a second. Mr. Brooke seconded.

Representative Suozzi asked George Rhynedance to poll the members regarding the adoption of the Charter. All members voted aye and the Charter was adopted as amended. He added that anybody who wants to further review or provide suggestions as to how the Charter should be amended in the future is encouraged to do so in writing to the DFO and the Board.

#### **CHAIR/VICE CHAIR:**

The next order of business was the election of a new Chair and Vice Chair.

Representative Suozzi stated the new Chair is supposed to be a member of the Senate, but members of the Senate indicated they are not interested in serving as the Chair.

Senator Wicker's staff member, Alexis Rudd, asked that the Board confirm with all the Senators to make sure this was accurate. She stated that Senator Wicker was appointed to the Board the

day before the meeting. She mentioned voting on the Chair virtually or via email has been done in the past when Representative Suozzi inquired if the Board could vote on the Chair without him at the meeting.

The DFO offered to delay the vote on the chair until we coordinated with the new members, including Senator Wicker.

Representative Suozzi indicated his preference was to vote on a vice chair today with permission from the members of the Board. He offered to nominate Rep. Carbajal to serve as Vice Chair based on his responsibilities in Congress and given that he has shown an interest in the Academy. Rep. Suozzi said if Rep. Carbajal was elected today, that he would continue to run the meeting just to keep things moving.

Representative Suozzi asked for a second for Representative Carbajal to serve as Vice Chair of the Board. A second was offered by RADM Wettlaufer. Representative Suozzi then asked if anybody else wanted to make a nomination for vice chair. There was no response.

Representative Suozzi then asked George Rhynedance to poll the board members regarding the appointment of Representative Carbajal as vice chair of the Board. All members voted aye.

Representative Carbajal addressed the Board saying he looked forward to serving the Board in the capacity of Vice Chair. He acknowledged there are a lot of challenges that he can help solve. He referenced a few of the challenges, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, the need to strengthen diversity, and infrastructure issues as areas of concern on which he thought the Board needed to work collaboratively.

Representative Suozzi officially welcomed the Vice Chair.

#### **PUBLIC LETTERS:**

Representative Suozzi talked about how the board had received 250 letters during the public comment period, which was a much larger number of letters than usual. He indicated there was a letter writing campaign and that several letters came in after the deadline; he recommended that the 10 letters received after the deadline be included in the record. In general, the letters the Board received referenced the infrastructure challenge, the Sea Year pause, getting EMBARC in place on commercial carriers, and the Board of Visitors being more engaged with the future of Academy. He thanked the Parents and Alumni Associations for the letters their members had sent.

#### **PARENTS & ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS:**

Representative Suozzi asked if the Parents Association or the Alumni Association would like to make some quick comments even though such comments were not really part of the normal course of a Board meeting.

Keith McLiverty of the Parent's Association thanked Rep. Suozzi for his commitment to the USMMA and identified issues that were concerning to the parents.

Jim Tobin of the Alumni Association addressed the Board.

Representative Suozzi indicated that since the agenda was busy, he would like to go through the meeting and save opening statements unless somebody had something that they wanted to share now. He asked if anybody objected. No one commented.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

Representative Suozzi asked VADM Buono to lead discussions of the strategic priorities (the order of the strategic priorities was changed because Representative Suozzi wanted to discuss infrastructure first and to address sexual assault and sexual harassment toward the end of the discussion).

VADM Buono addressed the Board. He thanked Representative Suozzi and welcomed the new and returning members as well as the MARAD leadership. VADM Buono explained that the mission of the United States Merchant Marine Academy, of course, is to graduate leaders of exemplary character who are committed to serve the economic and national security of this nation. He stated how excited he is that in June, the Academy will graduate the class of 2022, which persevered through enormous adversity. He then explained that the agenda is set up to follow the Academy's strategic plan, which is comprised of six strategic priorities (starting with infrastructure, then moving to the educational program, institutional culture, governance, leadership and accountability, communications and relationships, and athletics). Following that, the regimental commander would provide the state of the regiment.

RDML Sue Dunlap then welcomed the members of the Board and discussed the progress of infrastructure projects. She apologized for the atmosphere in the conference room but explained it was a graphic example of the help they need to bring the infrastructure up to date to modernize the Academy. She gave an overview of several projects underway and explained that there were a couple of projects that did not finish on time or on budget, namely Samuels Hall and Lower Roosevelt Field. It was demonstrated through those projects that they did not have an adequate level of program management expertise on campus. MARAD & DOT stepped in to bring in program managers to help get key programs back on track. She thanked Congress for the direct hire authority and explained that they have used at least four direct hire positions for the Academy to hire organic project managers and contracting officers. She also discussed the MMARINER Council approving several projects for study and review.

Representative Suozzi asked RDML Dunlap to speak to the Board about what needs to happen to get the infrastructure up to speed. Specifically, he asked her to talk about the report mentioned by the Alumni Association. She indicated a plan that addresses everything holistically is what the Academy needs, and they should engage the Army Corps of Engineers or similar entity to address the issues.

Representative Suozzi asked Acting Maritime Administrator Lessley to address this issue as well, including what the next steps should be.

Acting Maritime Administrator Lessley explained she thought the next step is to do an alternatives analysis or something similar.

VADM Buono then addressed the past plans.

Mr. Lutz recommended they engage outside sources because the Academy does not have the expertise to handle this. He also urged everyone to go see the buildings in person to fully understand.

Representative Suozzi recommended to the Board of Visitors, especially to the Members of Congress, to be aggressive to address the Academy's infrastructure needs. He also recommended to the Board that they assign two members to each of the strategic priorities to consistently follow up and report back to the Board regarding the progress of strategic priorities. He asked Ms. Boykin if she would consider serving as one of the liaisons on infrastructure issues due to her experience and expertise.

Rep. Suozzi asked George Rhynedance to send an email out to the Board of Visitors regarding the six strategic priority issues to see who from the Board would be willing to serve as liaisons on each issue.

The Associate Dean (standing in for Admiral Ballard) discussed strategic priority number one, education. He gave an overview of the COVID impacts and explained how they were proactive in addressing the gaps in learning among the members of the incoming class by doing a curriculum review.

VADM Buono recognized and thanked the academic department and faculty. He discussed how the students have been challenged by having to study virtually due to COVID and that's why some of the deficiency rates have been significantly greater.

He also addressed the updates to the Sea Year program and how admissions were slightly down, especially in minority and women recruitment.

Representative Suozzi urged the importance of increasing minority applications and asked that the Academy prepare for the Board a 2-page plan to increase minority enrollment. VADM Buono said the Academy would be happy to prepare that.

RDML Dunlap moved into discussing strategic priority 3, institutional culture. She introduced Ms. Julie Hodge and explained she has been instrumental in stepping in to help since the departure of the victim advocates and sexual assault response coordinator (SARC). She explained how Ms. Hodge facilitated the scenario-based Sea Year training and developed and delivered SASH training. She also discussed how victim advocacy remains a high interest for the Midshipman. She gave an overview of the status of each of the direct hire positions.

RADM Wettlaufer offered reflections on Military Sealift Command's experience developing a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program, and specifically interviewing and selecting the correct people. He also asked, "what is holding back the commercial operators from enrolling in the EMBARC program in strategic priority #2?"

Representative Suozzi responded that he held meetings on that topic with the commercial carriers, together with MARAD and the Academy, to get them to sign up for EMBARC. His observations of those meetings were that commercial carriers are concerned about liability, bad press, impact on their brands, and the amount of work required to set these processes up. Representative Suozzi asked Acting Maritime Administrator Lessley to elaborate on this from her perspective.

Acting Maritime Administrator Lessley updated the Board on EMBARC enrollments. She discussed the need to educate about inclusion in the safety management system and thanked the U.S. Coast Guard for all their support in helping MARAD help the carriers understand how the EMBARC standards can be voluntarily included in the safety management system.

Ms. Boykin inquired if there had been consideration of a different approach to the requirement for being in or out of EMBARC.

Acting Administrator Lessley responded that "it's in or out," and that carriers must be in compliance at the time of enrollment.

Ms. Boykin said she was completely on board with that approach. She also recognized that a significant organizational change in culture is not a light switch.

Acting Administrator Lessley explained that MARAD recognized they did not get everything right and reaffirmed MARAD's commitment to continuous improvement of EMBARC.

Representative Suozzi asked if any Board members were inclined to be involved with the EMBARC and sexual harassment issues. He asked Ms. Boykin if she would prefer to do this, or if she would prefer to examine infrastructure, to which she responded she would do whatever was most helpful given how the Board aligned on the issues.

The discussion continued on Sea Year with VADM Buono explaining that with the help of the Coast Guard, Military Sealift Command, State Maritime Academies, and commercial carriers enrolled in EMBARC, every Midshipman (outside of exceptional circumstances) will be able to sit for their licensing exam this academic year at the normal time.

Acting Administrator Lessley thanked the Coast Guard, Military Sealift and the Navy for helping with Sea Year.

Mr. Carmel opined that the object is to train people properly. He emphasized how much resistance there has been from officers at sea who simply don't want cadets back because they are afraid. Having cadets ignored out of fear does not equate to a meaningful Sea Year.

RADM Wettlaufer offered Military Sealift Command's perspective on the cadets they took to sea. He explained they visited ships with their SAPR person to talk to the cadets away from everyone.

The discussion continued with an update on diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Acting Administrator Lessley updated the Board that Admiral Phillips had been confirmed as Maritime Administrator and Laila Linares from MARAD was starting a detail to be USMMA's Acting Chief of Staff. She updated the Board that MARAD had engaged a search firm to help recruit the new Superintendent. She also provided an update on the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Report recommendations, specifically the recommendation that MARAD establish a Task Force.

Representative Suozzi asked Acting Administrator Lessley what the biggest takeaway from the report issued by NAPA.

Acting Maritime Administrator Lessley responded that the takeaway is that there are challenges in all aspects of the Academy's operations, that they are long standing, and that it will require sustained efforts over many years and a significant commitment of resources to address these issues. She added that MARAD and DOT have recognized from the beginning that this institution plays a critical role in our national security or economic security and the Department and agency have been committed to the process of addressing these recommendations. She indicated that many of the recommendations are consistent with streams of work that are already ongoing.

George Rhynedance gave an update on relationships regarding pandemic travel restrictions, testing, and quarantine requirements. He also gave an update on how communication via social media about COVID was beneficial at the Academy.

The Academy's Athletic Director gave an update on athletics.

Midshipman King provided a Regimental update to the Board.

Representative Suozzi urged his congressional colleagues to invite Midshipman King to Washington D.C.

Representative Suozzi updated the Board on the Superintendent's departure and thanked VADM Buono for his service.

**CLOSING REMARKS:**

Representative Suozzi opened up the floor to the Board members for closing comments and asked Rep. Carbajal to comment first. Representative Carbajal stated he looked forward to his service on the Board and working with the Board. He then recognized Acting Maritime Administrator Lessley for all the work she does.

The closing comments continued from the Board members.

Representative Suozzi asked Representative Sherrill if she would be willing to take on one of the strategic priorities. She responded with "certainly."

Representative Suozzi closed the meeting at approximately 3:00 p.m. by thanking the Board members for attending and their good work.

**USMMA Board of Visitors**  
**Certification of Meeting Minutes**

Co-Chairman's certification of, and direction to post the minutes of the USMMA Board of Visitor's meeting held on campus at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy on May 13, 2022.

Salud O. Carbajal I hereby certify that, the foregoing minutes of the USMMA Board of Visitors are accurate and complete. They will be archived on the USMMA Board of Visitors website.

*LOCEP*

Representative Salud Carbajal, Co-Chairman, USMMA Board of Visitors

Date: 1/3/23

Submitted by: Mary Grice, Designated Federal Officer of the USMMA Board of Visitors.