**MEETING OF THE U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY**

**BOARD OF VISITORS**

**THURSDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2015**

**U.S. CAPITOL VISITOR’S CENTER**

**ATTENDEES**:

BOARD OF VISITORS MEMBERS: Senator John Boozman (AR); Senator Roger Wicker (MS); VADM Charles Michel, Deputy Commandant for Operations, U.S. Coast Guard; RADM Thomas “T.K.” Shannon, Commander Military Sealift Command, U.S. Navy

STAFF: Staff representing the Senate Commerce Committee, Representative Peter King (NY-2), and Represenative John Garamendi (CA-3) were present.

MARAD/DOT OFFICIALS: Maritime Administrator Paul Jaenichen, Deputy Administrator Michael Rodriguez; USMMA Superintendent RADM James Helis, USMS; Brian Blower, MARAD Academy Liaison and Board of Visitors Designated Federal Officer; Michael Novak, MARAD Office of Congressional and Public Affairs; and Angela Stroschein, MARAD Office of Congressional and Public Affairs

**PURPOSE:** To brief the Board of Visitors (Board) on the state of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA, Academy) and the 2015 Advisory Board Report to The Secretary of Transportation.

There not being a quorum of members present, Maritime Administrator Jaenichen commenced the meeting at 10:05 a.m. with welcoming remarks and introductions of the members and the Maritime Administration (MARAD) representatives in attendance.

**SUPERINTENDENT’S COMMENTS:**

Superintendent Helis provided an overview of the Academy Advisory Board’s 2014 report to the Secretary of Transportation and the Academy’s efforts to implement the recommendations of the Secretary. He noted that the Academy was undergoing a self-study review as part of the re-accreditation process and that the Academy Advisory Board met with the Self-Study Committee and the Faculty Forum on February 12-13th to review progress and provide advice on the self-study report and the accreditation process.

RADM Helis reported on the highlights of the President’s Fiscal Year 2016 Budget request, noting an increase of nearly $17 million for additional personnel, simulator upgrades, facilities maintenance and academic building renovation. He highlighted the critical infrastructure improvements that were recently completed including renovation of all barracks, upgrades to Delano Hall and the replacement of Mallory Pier. He then discussed the ongoing efforts to reduce the backlog of maintenance issues. RADM Helis pointed out the need for steady and reliable cash flow in order to keep the critical infrastructure projects on schedule.

Administrator Jaenichen highlighted the necessity of completing architectural and engineering studies for the academic buildings which have some flexibility in the timing of funding, but cannot be delayed too long due to the deteriorating condition of the buildings.

**DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR’S COMMENTS:**

Deputy Administrator Rodriguez introduced himself and highlighted his ties to the Academy as a 1979 graduate, as well as a former employee who administered the Academy’s at-sea training program from 1997 to 2001. He mentioned he had recently visited the Academy where he met with faculty, staff and students. He noted there was some tension between the faculty and students over the keeping of office hours and the inability of some faculty to relay their knowledge to the students, but he pointed out that both issues were being addressed.

**SEXUAL ASSAULT/SEXUAL HARASSMENT REPORT:**

Superintendent Helis provided an update on the status of the 2013-2014 sexual assault and sexual (SH/SA) harassment study. Both Senator Wicker and Senator Boozman had questions about the SH/SA report methodology, number of midshipmen participating in the survey, how the Merchant Marine Academy compared to the other service academies, and where the assaults were taking place.

**DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICER’S COMMENTS:**

Mr. Blower provided an overview of the composition of the Board of Visitors for the 114th Congress with a brief explanation of the need for a charter and the quorum requirements necessary to elect a Chairman of the Board. He stated that MARAD recommends the election of the Chairman take place via a “virtual” (electronic) meeting after 11 Congressional members have been named. Mr. Blower suggested that, once all Board members are appointed, the next Board meeting take place at the Academy and offered that MARAD will work with the Member’s staff to find a suitable time for a meeting.

Sen. Boozman noted that his staff was looking at the Naval Academy’s Board of Visitors charter as a template for the USMMA Board and that once the full Board is appointed he would like to meet to “figure out” the charter.

**QUESTIONS:**

Senator Wicker and Senator Boozman had additional questions about the Academy Advisory Board’s work and the accreditation process.  They asked about student concerns regarding access to faculty and improving instruction methods.  Senator Wicker asked specifically whether there were plans to move from a trimester to quarter system.  Superintendent Helis stated that there were no formal plans to change the system, but he pointed out some of the challenges associated with the heavy training requirements such as the lack of summer break resulting in insufficient time for research and curriculum review by the faculty.

Both Senators asked about retention of faculty and student attrition with special interest in the number of students who don’t graduate or who take more than four years to complete their studies.

Senator Wicker asked a number of questions about the accreditation process and Senator Boozman inquired about graduate placement in industry.

There being no further questions or discussion, the meeting was adjourned.