

commercial vessel owners and operators of maritime fleets and, importantly, the workers in these important industries for decades—regulatory problems and challenges that these important industries and the important men and women who work in these industries have been struggling with for decades with no long-term solutions. At long last, this bill addresses these—the long-term, permanent solutions.

What am I talking about?

Currently, our fishing fleets throughout the entire country, as well as vessel owners and operators—again, throughout the entire country in rivers, lakes, and oceans—are forced to comply with a patchwork of burdensome Federal and State regulations that are well-intentioned but often conflicted for incidental discharges off the decks of these ships and for ballast water. Let me start with the incidental discharges.

Again, it is very important to my State but very important to any State with regard to the fishing industry and fishermen who work hard every day. If you are a commercial fisherman on a fishing vessel and you have caught some fish and you want to hose down your deck—because let's face it; fishing can be a bit of a messy business—through a long history of requirements and lawsuits, you are forced to report to the EPA these incidental discharges, and you need to get a permit to hose down your deck of a fishing vessel or you will face a fine.

Now, you don't have to be a fisherman to recognize that this is ridiculous and that people—Democrats and Republicans in this body—have been trying to address this issue for decades because it creates inefficiency, and it certainly doesn't help the environment. It adds to costs, inhibits economic prosperity, and hurts fishermen and the vessels they operate. This body has introduced short-term fixes for years to try and address this. Those have not been sufficient. So this bill addresses it for good.

Let me talk about another provision that tries to cut through the patchwork of burdensome State regulations—again, well-intentioned but often conflicted for ballast water and vessels. Currently, ballast water is regulated by both the Coast Guard and the EPA. They both have separate, inconsistent, and sometimes directly conflicting sets of Federal requirements that are interdispersed with requirements from States. This is literally a patchwork of requirements for vessels that move through different State waters. Let me give you an example.

You are the owner-operator of a commercial vessel that is going up the full length of the Mississippi River. You are moving commerce and keeping a strong economy stronger. As you do that, not only must you comply with inconsistent Coast Guard and EPA requirements, but you also will likely have to comply with different and separate requirements regarding ballast

water for Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. You get the picture. It is a patchwork of regulations—all well-intentioned—that has the impact of inhibiting commerce and, most importantly, of inhibiting job opportunities for the men and women in this commerce. Twenty-five States have been regulating ballast water under separate, inconsistent, and sometimes directly conflicting sets of requirements. This has not only inhibited U.S. economic growth, but it also actually makes it more likely that invasive species will accidentally be introduced into this ballast water because the requirements are so different, it is hard to keep up with them.

So, again, what this bill does at long last, working across the aisle—and trust me, we worked on this for over a year, on these provisions, Democrats and Republicans rolling up their sleeves, in good faith, getting to work. Because we know how important this is to our constituents, we looked at and focused on getting permanent solutions, not quick fixes—the way these issues have been handled in the past, for over a decade—to these significant challenges.

This bill will provide a permanent exemption on incidental vessel discharges for all commercial fishing vessels and commercial vessels under 79 feet in length. This is very important to the American fishing industry, the men and women in that industry, and it is something that they have been advocating for and Members of this body, of both parties, have been trying to get for well over a decade. Well, we did it today. That is important. As I said, without this exemption, small vessel owner-operators would be required, as they have been for years, to get an EPA permit to hose off their decks—not a good use of the EPA and not a good use of the hard-working time of American fishermen.

Similarly, this bill provides a comprehensive solution to this patchwork ballast water challenge that I just described, establishing a single, nationally uniform standard for the regulation of ballast water and other vessel discharges, and the EPA and the Coast Guard, with input from the States, will work together. This uniform standard will have the impact of helping our environment and our maritime industry and fishing industry workers and the U.S. economy all at the same time. That is an important accomplishment, and that is why over 90 Senators voted for this bill today.

In conclusion, the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard do heroic work day in and day out. I am honored to chair the subcommittee of the Commerce Committee in charge of the Coast Guard. This bipartisan bill will support them and their incredibly important mission, and it was long overdue. It was long overdue, but we got it done.

The Coast Guard's motto, "Semper Paratus"—"Always Ready"—is a

motto I think we can learn from here in the U.S. Senate. It is so appropriate for what they do for us. I want to make sure that the members of the Coast Guard who are watching or learning about this bill know that it is a signal that they have strong bipartisan support from the vast majority of the Members of the U.S. Senate.

Hopefully, this bill will get over to the House quickly. We have been working closely with the House on a number of these provisions, and they are going to pass it, we hope, and we will get it to the President soon for his signature.

Going forward, we have to work to make sure there is not an almost 2-year delay in getting the Coast Guard Authorization Act passed in the U.S. Senate. When we work together, we can see that it is very bipartisan.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, the Presiding Officer and I both know that the National Defense Authorization Act moves every year. What I think we need to do is make sure, when we start debating the NDAA in late spring, early summer every year, as we do, that we reserve time to move and debate and pass the Coast Guard bill as well. This is an issue I have raised with the leadership on both sides of the aisle, with the chairmen of the Commerce Committee and the Armed Services Committee, and I am hopeful that we can make some progress on that so we are moving a Coast Guard Authorization Act, as we should be, with the other services in the NDAA. But that is for tomorrow. For today, we have an important accomplishment for our country, an important accomplishment for the State of Alaska, and most importantly, an important accomplishment for the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard who continue to undertake heroic actions day in and day out on our behalf.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO STEVE MAGRUDER

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, Steve Magruder has devoted his life to helping working families. For more than 40 years, Steve faithfully served as a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers International Local 176. Last week, Steve retired as the business manager of Local 176, a position he held for 8 years.