

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS

February 10, 2005

1:08 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bob Lynn, Chair
Representative Nancy Dahlstrom
Representative Bill Thomas
Representative Sharon Cissna
Representative Max Gruenberg

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Jim Elkins
Representative Lesil McGuire

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Charlie Huggins

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: MARINE EXCHANGE OF ALASKA

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

PAUL FUHS, Board President
Marine Exchange of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of the Marine Exchange of Alaska.

CAPTAIN ED PAGE, Executive Director
Marine Exchange of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of the Marine Exchange of Alaska.

BILL BENNING, Operations Manager

Marine Exchange of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding the Marine Exchange of Alaska.

JOHN PARROTT, Vice President/Alaska General Manager
Totem Ocean Trailer Express
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented on the Marine Exchange tracking system.

NICK MARRONE, Vice President
Seafarers International Union
San Francisco, California

POSITION STATEMENT: Asked questions regarding the Marine Exchange tracking systems.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR BOB LYNN called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at [1:08:43 PM](#). Representatives Lynn, Dahlstrom, Thomas, Cissna, and Gruenberg were present at the call to order.

OVERVIEW: MARINE EXCHANGE OF ALASKA

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CHAIR LYNN announced that the only order of business would be an overview of the Marine Exchange of Alaska.

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PAUL FUHS, Board President, Marine Exchange of Alaska, stated that the organization was formed about three years ago to provide services to the maritime industry. He commented that after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the government was able to track the hijacked airplanes to determine what had occurred, but that tracking capability had never been used on the water. He stated that the Marine Exchange of Alaska has been developing a tracking capability primarily for search and rescue. The impetus for the project was the 2001 sinking of the F/V Arctic Rose with 15 people on board. He remarked that after the sinking, it took six hours to discover that the sister ship was seven miles away and could have assisted the Arctic Rose. At that point, the Marine Exchange began working on long-

range tracking and Geographical Information System (GIS) data systems for plotting data.

MR. FUHS stated that the Marine Exchange of Alaska has received a grant from the United States Coast Guard (USCG) of \$1.3 million to test the tracking system, "which we think will become the standard for the entire United States." He explained that one impetus for this system is that Alaska is so vast, with 30,000 miles of coastline. He commented that in some ports a person could look through a pair of binoculars and see everything that is coming in, but in Alaska that cannot be done. He explained that another reason the Marine Exchange of Alaska was formed was that "no state is more maritime than Alaska." He said that 90 percent of the goods that come into the state come by water, and 95 percent of the state's exports leave on the water. He said that Alaska could not function as an economy without the local maritime trades.

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MR. FUHS said that another reason that the Marine Exchange of Alaska was formed was because "the only time people ever hear about the marine trades is when somebody's had a wreck and oil is spilled all over, or a ship has crashed and ... people are dying and things like that. But very few people have an appreciation for what the maritime trades actually bring to Alaska." He said that the Marine Exchange of Alaska has brought together all the unions, the employers, all the training facilities, including Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC) and Outside training facilities because there isn't a coordinated program to provide training for Alaskans to work in the maritime trades. He pointed out that the Department of Labor (DOL) found that about 45 percent of maritime jobs are filled by nonresidents. He said, "These are good jobs but many of them are licensed jobs, and you can't work unless you have the license and you have the education. A lot of our kids grew up on the water ... because we're a maritime state, so it just seemed like a natural to us."

MR. FUHS commented that there were many people in the audience who were attending a collaborative consortium, and "we had some really great meetings today, and we're going to file a report from that. We've gotten a grant from [Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Greg O'Claray] to put this whole thing together, and it's the first time that it's ever happened for the maritime trade."

MR. FUHS then introduced Captain Ed Page, who once headed up the USCG Marine Safety Office in Juneau. He said Captain Page used to be the Captain of the Port in Long Beach, California, where he set up "a similar government/private sector consortium." He remarked, "We've got great companies up here in the maritime trades. They want to operate safely. They want to contribute to our state, and they've made a real commitment" to hiring Alaskans.

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CAPTAIN ED PAGE, Executive Director, Marine Exchange of Alaska, stated the Marine Exchange of Alaska is a non-profit with the mission to provide information, communications, and services to help ensure safe, secure, efficient, and environmentally responsible maritime operations.

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CAPTAIN PAGE explained that marine exchanges originated in the 1800s to exchange maritime information. Initially a spyglass was used to monitor ship arrivals, and then the information would be exchanged between interested parties. Now the exchange organizations use telephones, faxes, satellite communications, and other transponder systems. The Alaska Exchange is part of the Maritime Information Services of North America, which is a coalition of non-profit organizations in the United States and Canada, Captain Page said, and he noted that he is the president of that group.

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CAPTAIN PAGE named the founding members of the Marine Exchange, and pointed out that the Marine Exchange interacts with different segments of the maritime community, including tankers, ferries, USCG vessels, container ships, and cruise ships.

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CAPTAIN PAGE emphasized that Alaska needs qualified mariners. He posited that the exchange's most important program is Pride in Education to help Alaskans operate vessels that ply Alaska's waters. He said that once Alaskans have been given information and necessary tools, they will be safe, secure, efficient, and environmentally responsible. He listed more of the exchange's programs: maritime database, printing updated charts, vessel

tracking, and compliance with safety, security, and environmental regulations.

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CAPTAIN PAGE stated that it is "critical to our way of life, that the maritime industry ... gets our natural resources to market." He added that his group supports educational programs and has been going to middle schools to get youth interested. Regarding security, he said, ships are prime targets. A cruise ship with several thousand people "could be a 9/11-type caliber event, especially if you took a couple ... simultaneously." Tankers, container ships, cargo vessels, and maritime facilities are targets too, he said. He stated that knowing vessel locations is important.

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CAPTAIN PAGE said the threat is being addressed as a shared commitment. The USCG, the state, and the marine industry has spent millions in security plans, training, and new equipment while following the new Maritime Security Act. He said, "We can't wait until people come right up to our doorstep and see if they're OK. We want to know where those ships came from, and we want to know where they are right now to help manage our threat."

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CAPTAIN PAGE said Admiral Collins has talked about locating ships with an automatic identification system and a long range tracking system that would aid in providing information on vessels long before they reach our ports. He said the exchange developed the Automatic Secure Vessel Tracking System, which tracks vessels around the world at a the low cost of \$3 per day. He said Congress saw the merit of using existing maritime systems.

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MR. FUHS said the Global Marine Distress Signaling System (GMDSS) is on ships, and by hitting a trigger, the ship's location can be determined. He said they can also be programmed remotely.

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CAPTAIN PAGE said it is easier to protect a vessel by knowing its location. It can also identify a suspect vessel. The exchange also uses satellite systems which track a vessel every two hours for the past year or two. The vessels that don't share information are then suspect.

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MR. FUHS said there is incentive for ships to work with the USCG because they will have fewer inspections.

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CAPTAIN PAGE gave an example of data from the summer of 2004, and showed the color-coded positions of vessels.

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REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM asked if there is an identifier for foreign-flagged vessels.

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CAPTAIN PAGE said currently there aren't many foreign flagged ships in the program, but it could be done. "I would think that everybody who is doing the right thing should participate," because they'll get express lane privileges, he said.

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MR. FUHS said the exchange is working with USCG, which requires 96-hour advance notification. The ships currently supply paperwork, but with the new system there is actual knowledge of everywhere that ship has been.

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CAPTAIN PAGE said if a ship's system is turned off, it becomes an anomaly to be watched. He said the satellite can still pick up the location, but it cannot get identifying information. When he was in the Coast Guard, he would have to fly for several hours to track the unknown boats, he said.

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CAPTAIN PAGE said the Coast Guard called the exchange when a vessel was adrift and asked it to track it. He said he was

watching the vessel from Juneau and when the Coast Guard called and said it had sighted the vessel and it was anchored, the exchange could tell from Juneau that it was actually drifting.

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MR. FUHS said the program is accurate to about five feet.

CAPTAIN PAGE said the exchange was working on a different system that is like an aircraft transponder. Receiver sites need to be built, and there is a grant from the USCG that the exchange is working on now.

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MR. FUHS said the exchange has a contract with the Office of Naval Intelligence to provide data.

CAPTAIN PAGE said the exchange works out of two locations in downtown Juneau. It is password-protected, so companies can use it for their business only.

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CAPTAIN PAGE showed the committee live computer screens of the output from the system, and walked the committee through the details. He said the benefits were related to security, environmental response, efficiency, and safety.

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REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS asked if there was any tracking devices on the crab boat that just went down.

CAPTAIN PAGE said there was not.

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MR. FUHS showed the past data of the M/V Tustumena in the Alaska Marine Highway System. He proposed an "adopt a ship" program where students can track individual ships for education purposes, including email communications from the boats. It can also report on weather from all weather buoys.

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MR. FUHS said weather buoys provide wave period, atmospheric pressure, wind speed, direction, wave height, air and water temperature, and ice accretion. Each data point is no more than six minutes old, he added.

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CAPTAIN PAGE said this is all about exchanging information with new technology. He said the exchange has been working with the federal government and now wants to get Alaska involved.

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CAPTAIN PAGE said there is a whole suite of indexes and overlays. He said they are putting transponders on buildings.

MR. FUHS said it can also calculate a ship's speed.

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NICK MARRONE, Vice President, Seafarers International Union, San Francisco asked what the cost is to the vessel.

CAPTAIN PAGE said the Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) equipment is \$8,000. Other equipment is required, and some of it is old equipment being reprogrammed. He noted that the equipment is being tested all the time.

MR. FUHS said the AIS system is expensive but there are cheaper systems for \$500.

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REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS asked about the Alaska Department of Fish and Game using the tracking system to track fishery violations.

CAPTAIN PAGE said there is another system for fisheries, but it is one-way information, and it doesn't go to the USGS. Captain Page said he told the department that there is a better system.

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MR. FUHS said the USGS is spending more money on false rescues than real ones, but the new system can help verify the situation.

CAPTAIN PAGE said the information is being archived, mostly for security. It is easier to archive data that come in every two hours, but not so much for the AIS data that come in every 12 seconds. He said the system is in a "growth mode."

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MR. FUHS said the exchange is asking the state for homeland security money from the state's allocation. "We can make this a 24/7 operation for about \$250-300,000. The Marine Highway System wants the capability, he added.

REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM asked where the funding request is coming from.

MR. FUHS said it is being made through the administration, and the Department of Transportation is supporting it, and the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs has the homeland security money.

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CAPTAIN PAGE, in response to a question, said kayaks are the smallest vessels that can be tracked.

BILL BENNING, Operations Manager, Marine Exchange of Alaska, said the AIS might be affected by weather but satellites aren't. The biggest hurdle in Alaska is mountainous geography.

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MR. BENNING said the system uses a variety of satellites.

CAPTAIN PAGE said some satellites are better for Alaska than others.

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REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked about weather overlays.

MR. FUHS said it is hard to get broadband to a vessel, but emails can be sent with a satellite, and therefore vessels can get weather buoy information.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA said she is reading The Perfect Storm, and said weather information can help people on the high seas.

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REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM asked about a documented procedure that must be followed regarding homeland security.

CAPTAIN PAGE said they are constantly in contact with the USCG. He explained that the systems are still evolving; it is all new. The AIS contract started in October, and there are now six sites up. The Alaska Exchange is a leader in these systems.

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CHAIR LYNN asked what the legislature can do.

MR. FUHS said to "encourage the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs to accept our proposal to advance the system." Some people in the department have seen this presentation.

CAPTAIN PAGE said there have been several requests into the department, and he listed staff who have seen the presentation.

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REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS asked if the system tracks military vessels.

CAPTAIN PAGE said the system tracks some USCG vessels, but no other military vessels.

JOHN PARROTT, Vice President/Alaska General Manager, Totem Ocean Trailer Express, Anchorage, said the exchange in Alaska is one of the youngest exchanges but it is leading the field. He said as a founder of the organization, he is "very proud of what these guys have done." He added that his ships are tracked with zero impact on their operation. It is a very good system, and he said he hasn't found any difficulties.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked how much need there is for maritime training facilities, and if there is a need for merchant marine or mariner academy in "this part of the country."

CHAIR LYNN said there is interest in such an academy in Kodiak.

CAPTAIN PAGE said there are many jobs available for people with maritime training, and "training in Alaska is our goal." He said he doesn't want to hear about people flying to New Orleans to get training. Maritime jobs pay well and are critical to Alaska's well being, he concluded.

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MR. FUHS had numerous people in the audience introduce themselves. He said there is also interest in maritime training within the secondary schools in Alaska.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at [2:08:26 PM](#).