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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4303

September 23, 2016

COMMITTEES:
WAYS AND MEANS

CHAIRMAN:
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COMMISSIONER:
U.S.-RUSSIAN JOINT
COMMISSION ON POW/MIAs

REGENT:
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The Honorable Anthony Foxx
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Paul Jaenichen
Maritime Administrator
U.S. Maritime Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Admiral James A. Helis
Superintendent
U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
300 Steamboat Road
Kings Point, NY 11024

Dear Secretary Foxx, Administrator Jaenichen, and Admiral Helis:

As a 29-year Air Force veteran, a Prisoner of War for nearly seven years, and a staunch advocate for our nation's military and service academies, I write to express my deep concern about ongoing issues at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. Over the last several months my staff and I have heard from many constituent Midshipmen, their families, and constituent alumni of the Academy regarding the Sea Year stand down, accreditation uncertainties, and concerns with Academy leadership.

I am particularly concerned by the cancellation of the Academy's Sea Year program. This is a unique and critical aspect of the education Midshipmen receive while at the Academy. The continued suspension of the Sea Year program will undoubtedly impact the quality of education these Midshipmen receive, and may affect their ability to obtain a Coast Guard license and graduate on-time.

Considering that cadets from state maritime academies continue to sail on commercial vessels as a part of their curriculum, I would respectfully ask for the full reinstatement of the Sea Year program as soon as is practicable. I am also very concerned by the news that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education issued a warning that the Academy's accreditation may be in jeopardy. The issues raised by the recent audit are serious and must be swiftly addressed by Academy leadership.

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy is a unique and treasured American institution. Many great American leaders and military officers gained their first leadership and maritime experiences as Midshipmen at the Academy. It is vital that we swiftly resolve these issues at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy to ensure that all Midshipmen continue to receive world class education and maritime training.

As someone who has always been a strong advocate in Congress for our service academies, I am asking for your immediate attention to these matters. I kindly request your responses before October 7, 2016.

Sincerely,



SAM JOHNSON
Member of Congress