



Fact Sheet: H.R. 1961 – To amend title 46, United States Code, to extend the exemption from the fire-retardant materials construction requirement for vessels operating within the Boundary Line

Background

- The Delta Queen is a steam driven, paddle-wheel riverboat that was built in 1926. It transported passengers on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers for over 60 years.
- The 174 passenger Delta Queen has a steel double hull, a steel paddlewheel, and a wooden superstructure.
- Since 1966, federal law (currently codified at Section 3503 of title 46, United States Code) has required vessels with overnight accommodations for more than 50 passengers to be built of fire-retardant material.
- Section 3503 included an exemption, which expired on November 1, 2008, for certain vessels in operation before 1968 and operating in internal waters. To qualify for the exemption, the vessel owner had to –
 - Notify passengers that the vessel did not meet fire safety standards;
 - Agree to be held liable for any death, injury, or loss caused by fire; and
 - Ensure alterations made to nonpublic spaces complied with fire-retardant regulations.
- Since it has a wooden superstructure, the Delta Queen operated under the section 3503 exemption from fire retardant material requirements. The section 3503 exemption has been extended by Congress 9 times since 1966.
- Although it operated under an exemption from the fire-retardant materials construction requirements, the Delta Queen complied with all other Coast Guard safety regulations. The vessel has a sprinkler system and a carbon dioxide flooding system for fire suppression.
- The exemption expired on November 1, 2008.

Summary

- H.R. 1961 was introduced by Rep. Steve Chabot (R-OH) on May 14, 2013. The bill currently has 21 bipartisan co-sponsors.
- H.R. 1961 would renew the section 3503 exemption through November 1, 2028.

Committee Action

None.

Amendments

Rep. Garamendi may offer an amendment.

Statement of Administration Policy

None.

Subcommittee Staff Contact and Phone Number

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