



**Rep. André Carson
Statement in Support**

**Coast Guard Reauthorization Act, Including the
DUCK BOAT SAFETY IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2022**

March 29, 2022

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of HR 6865, the Don Young Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2022.

I'd like to first acknowledge the sudden passing of Don Young, the Dean of the House, and the former Chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. I extend my condolences to his wife and family, and also to his staff. I had the pleasure of working with him on the Carson/Young bill, to create the National Center for the Advancement of Aviation, which is a bipartisan and a bicameral bill to improve aviation, which is so important to both of our states, Alaska and Indiana. It's only fitting that today's Coast Guard bill is now named in Congressman Young's memory.

Chairman DeFazio, I commend your leadership, and your collaboration on this Coast Guard bill, with Ranking Member Graves, Coast Guard Subcommittee Chair Carbajal and Ranking Member Gibbs. I am pleased to join our committee colleagues in supporting the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act because it will increase maritime safety and efficiency.

Chairman DeFazio, I am especially grateful to you for working with me over several years to develop the language that will finally address the persistent problems with unsafe vessels, and including my Duck Boat Safety Improvement Act in today's Coast Guard Reauthorization.

My Duck Boat Safety requirements, in Title III, Section 305, will finally implement safety regulations for amphibious passenger vessels, particularly those known as Duck Boats. These safety recommendations were made by federal agencies to address repeated problems associated with Duck Boats that have resulted in many injuries and fatalities that may have been prevented.

I became much more aware of these problems when my constituents in Indianapolis, the Coleman family, were involved in a horrible Duck Boat accident on July 19, 2018 in Branson, Missouri. Tia Coleman was one of only two survivors from her family of 11, losing her husband Glenn and her children Reece (nine years old), Evan (seven years old), and Arya (one year old). Tia's 13-year-old nephew, Donovan, was the other surviving family member, losing his mother Angela, his younger brother Maxwell (two years old), his uncles Ervin (76 years old) and Butch (70 years old), and his aunt Belinda (69 years old). Boarding a Duck Boat on Table Rock Lake started out as a fun outing for family members, but it turned into an unspeakable tragedy when the boat capsized and sank. Seventeen of the 31 passengers on board were killed.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and U.S. Coast Guard have separately investigated the incident and the last few aspects of the investigation should be completed soon.

But Congress should not wait to act. We know from past incidents that more can and should be done to make these vessels safer. Since 1999, more than 40 people have died in Duck Boats accidents, the vast majority of them from drowning when the vessel sinks. The NTSB in 2002 issued recommendations to improve the safety of these vessels in flooding or sinking situations but little has been done to implement those measures.

Duck Boats are hybrid vehicles that can travel on roadways and waterways, so the safety measures must be updated for both land and waterborne operations.

The Duck Boat Safety Improvement Act will require vessel operators to implement common-sense boating safety measures, including:

- Improving reserve buoyancy and watertight compartmentalization to prevent sinking,
- Requiring more monitoring and adherence to severe weather alerts and warnings,
- Requiring release of road safety seatbelts when Duck Boats become waterborne,
- Requiring stronger crew safety training and certification,
- Removing or reconfigure canopies and window coverings for waterborne operations,
- Requiring personal flotation devices for waterborne operations,
- Requiring installation of better bilge pumps and alarms,

- Installing underwater LED lights that activate automatically in emergencies, and
- Complying with other Coast Guard boating safety requirements.

These basic safety requirements will help save lives and prevent future tragedies.

I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting today's bill to make common-sense corrections to the persistent safety problems facing duck boats. If we act today, we can help ensure that no other family has to suffer the kind of tragedy faced by my constituents on Table Rock Lake. I urge the House to support this bill.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.