Harbor pilots steer clear of rule change

By Patrick Peterson
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$66 billion
Economic impact in Florida of cargo shipping industry in 2008

$6.3 billion
Amount spent in Florida by passengers, crew and cruise lines in 2008

$1,317.68
Average fee for a large vessel to enter a Florida port

94
Number of state-licensed harbor pilots

10
Number of ships that enter Port Canaveral each day

The Florida Alliance of Maritime Organizations, which hopes to reduce the rates paid to pilots, notes:

- The Board of Pilot Commissioners and the Pilotage Rate Review Board are operating short of members due to long-term vacancies, which "may affect the boards' effectiveness.
- Of the state's 94 active harbor pilots, 44 percent are 55 years or older. A rush of retirements soon could create a shortage of pilots.
- FAMO also questioned the Board of Pilot Commissioners' accountability. During a three-year period, only three complaints of the 49 investigations resulted in disciplinary action.

Our industry believes that the current pilotage structure needs reform," FAMO President Michael Page said. "Laws governing the pilots were established some 55 years ago and the (legislative) study affirms to us that it's time to update this structure to accommodate open competition whereby a larger pool of adequately trained harbor pilots can offer their services."

The report put pilot's salaries at $100,000 to over $400,000, similar to pilot compensation levels in other states with large ports. FAMO believes harbor pilots should be paid no more than air traffic controllers or ship captains, who generally earn less than $200,000.

A computer search of the Florida House and Senate Web sites revealed no bills regarding "harbor pilots" had been introduced by last week for the legislative session that begins Tuesday.

"I don't see anything coming up about harbor pilots," state Senate spokesman Jaryn Emhof said. "There could be things in the works."

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