

Senate committee approves measure supporting health care for commercial fishers

Contributed by Editor
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SACRAMENTO – The Senate Health Committee voted 6-3 Wednesday to approve Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 31 by North Coast State Senator Patricia Wiggins (D – Santa Rosa).

SJR 31 calls on the U.S. Congress and President George W. Bush to enact the federal “Commercial Fishing Health Care Coverage Act of 2008,” which would provide coverage for the nation’s commercial fishing men and women. Approval by the Health Committee means the measure now heads for a vote of the full Senate.

Wiggins, who chairs the Joint Legislative Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, said that even though commercial fishing remains one of the nation’s most dangerous professions, the number of men and women in that industry who lack health insurance is “three to four times greater than the national average.”

Her measure, Senate Joint Resolution 31, calls on the President, Vice President Dick Cheney, and members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to enact the “Commercial Fishing Health Care Coverage Act,” which is contained in two federal bills, S. 2630 and HR 5404, introduced by a bi-partisan group of Congressional representatives. If they were to become law, the federal bills would authorize funding to coastal states for planning and implementation of health care programs specific to the needs of a state’s commercial fishing fleet.

In her testimony before the committee, Wiggins said that the “fishing community is under-insured relative to most other industries because of the dangers of the job, the migratory nature of fishing fleets, and the irregular cash flow of the industry.”

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