

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1009

July 28, 2020

Rear Admiral Eric Jones
Seventh District Commander (D7)
United States Coast Guard
909 SE 1st Ave # 510, Miami, FL 33131

Dear Admiral Jones,

I write to express my disappointment with the recent decision to delay removal operations on the MV Golden Ray for two months until October 1.

Last year, on September 8, the Coastal Georgia community faced one of the worst shipwreck disasters in recent history when the MV Golden Ray capsized in the St. Simons Sound. Despite dangerous conditions, the Coast Guard valiantly rescued all crewmembers on board, preventing a disaster from becoming a human tragedy. Soon after, when the Golden Ray began hemorrhaging thick oil, Unified Command's Shoreline, Cleanup and Assessment Team (SCAT) acted swiftly to combat the pollution, while efforts to remove hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil from the ship successfully prevented any further leaks from threatening Georgia's coast. I want to commend the tireless effort of all the men and women whose swift and effective action has mitigated the damage caused by this unprecedented incident.

However, as early as mid-October, it was determined that the wreckage was unsalvageable and would instead need to be cut up and removed. Rather than begin removal operations as soon as November, the responsible party was instead allowed to choose a new salvage firm, which potentially delayed the demolition by several months. The Coast Guard found that exceptional circumstances justified switching contractors, arguing that the new contractor's plan to use large section demolition would allow for the most expedient removal of the ship. Since January, Coast Guard officials have repeatedly warned that it was critical to remove the wreckage by the start of hurricane season on June 1 to prevent further pollution releases in case of a storm.

Unfortunately, efforts to meet this target were unsuccessful. The new objective then became to remove the ship by the peak of hurricane season, which typically begins in August. In fact, as recently as July 9, Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer John Miller said that even if cutting operations overlap with the storm season's peak, "we're still planning to pursue it and get it going." He continued, "We're not anticipating waiting or delaying until after the hurricane season." As Texas cleans up after damage caused by Hurricane Hanna, the stark reality is that hurricane season is already well underway.

I also recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unforeseen challenges to both worker safety and supplying the necessary materials to complete the removal process. To be clear, I completely agree that the safety of those crew members working on removal operations must come first, and support the Coast Guard's decision to quarantine workers on floating barges in light of the recent outbreak. However, given the known risks associated with COVID-19, in addition to the importance of

finishing work before hurricane season, I am perplexed as to why it took until late July to formulate this plan.

In a March court ruling in Brunswick, Judge Lisa Godbey Wood (SDGA) clearly laid out the risks in delayed action, saying, “As long as [the ship] remains in the St. Simons Sound, this community’s waterways, coastline, and various important forms of marine life face an imminent environmental threat. Time compounds that threat.” With your most recent decision, Georgians now face the sobering fact that at best, the wreckage will likely remain in the St. Simons Sound into late 2020; and at worst, a major storm will upend all efforts and create an environmental catastrophe. Neither option is acceptable, yet it is where we find ourselves because of the decisions that have been made. That being said, I would like an answer about what has changed since July 9 to delay the commencement of removal of the MV Golden Ray, as well as your detailed contingency plan to address a potential major hurricane strike on the Georgia coast.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David A. Perdue", is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "A".

David A. Perdue
United States Senator