

SB 678 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 3/20, 3/27

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Appropriates \$1.9 million General Fund dollars to the Department of Administrative Services for distribution to return the vessel *Salvage Chief* to operation for emergency response and recovery purposes. Declares emergency, effective July 1, 2019.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- History of unique vessel
- Wide variety of capacities including: carry fuel; pump water; clear hazardous sunken debris in shipping lanes, waterways, shallow waters; refloat other vessels; land and transport a helicopter
- Capacity to clear submerged, collapsed bridges
- Critical location and value to region: up and down the West Coast, mouth of Columbia, and inland via the Columbia
- Value as an immediate regional asset especially within first weeks post disaster, before other responders arrive
- Value in context of speeding up *economic* recovery post disaster
- Investments already mad
- Current service as volunteer training vessel for Job Corps' Seamanship Program; approximately 7300 hours contributed to date
- Cost to procure equivalent capacities or services compared to investment in *Salvage Chief*
- Comparison to much older Portland fire boat *David Campbell*, built in 1927, still in active service

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The *Salvage Chief* was originally commissioned the *USS LSM-380*, one of 558 LSMs (landing crafts, medium) built for the U.S. Navy between 1944 and 1945, sized to carry five medium or three heavy tanks, or up to nine "Duck boats" (amphibious vehicles or DUKWs). She was manned by six officers and 54 crew and assigned to the Asia-Pacific theater, where LSMs proved critical to the Allies' success. Six months after assignment, on August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered and the *USS LSM-380* carried Marines to China to manage the repatriation of thousands to Japan. She then sailed to Guam, Pearl Harbor, and back across the Pacific to join the mothball fleet at Suisan Bay near San Francisco, destined for scrap. In 1948, she was decommissioned and purchased by Fred Devine, a visionary entrepreneur and salvage expert based out of Portland, who transformed and repurposed the ship for shallow-water salvage and recovery work, by scavenging and installing 60-ton pull anchor winches both fore and aft, and building an aft helicopter pad, among other unique modifications. The ship then operated out of Astoria

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starting in 1949 and became renowned for its rescue and recovery work over the next fifty years, particularly with large ships in dire situations, including refloating the grounded 10,000-ton Liberty ship *Yorkmar*, the Greek freighter *Captynn*, the 810-foot Liberian oil tanker *Sansinena*, the crippled *Exxon Valdez*, as well as barges, dredges, cruise ships, a Japanese troop ship, a U.S. Coast Guard cutter, and more. *Salvage Chief* is now owned by Salvage Chief, LLC, whose partners are attempting to transform it once more into a local asset for training and disaster response purposes. ("Salute to M/V *Salvage Chief* (ex-LSM 380)" by Jim Mockford, *Sea History* 162, Spring 2018, at <https://seahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/SH162-SalvChief.pdf>, accessed March 2019.)

The *Salvage Chief* has a remarkable history - it is already of notable historical, cultural and educational interest - but the longevity of its practical utility at the age of 75 is a credit to those who built it; to the community of Astoria where it is homed; to the extraordinary individuals who captained and crewed it and who partnered alongside every rescue and recovery operation; and particularly to those who originally conceived of and accomplished its unique transformation from military to commercial and public uses.

Senate Bill 678 appropriates \$1.9 million General Fund dollars to the Department of Administrative Services for distribution to the Salvage Chief Foundation - specifically \$1.2 million for hull repairs; \$400,000 for engine and fire pump upgrades; and \$300,000 to upgrade emergency communications and provide for U.S. Coast Guard inspection and contingency - to return the vessel *Salvage Chief* to operation for training and disaster response and recovery purposes.