



May 13, 2020

The Honorable Roger Wicker, Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking  
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Wicker and Ranking Member Cantwell:

On behalf of the undersigned American maritime labor organizations we wish to express our sincere appreciation for your support for the programs and policies important to the U.S.-flag maritime industry and to the jobs of the licensed and unlicensed American merchant mariners we represent. Unfortunately, our industry is experiencing a dangerous decline in the number of trained and qualified American merchant mariners available to crew the surge and sustainment vessels needed by the Department of Defense to protect America's interests and to support American troops deployed around the world.

We are writing today to urge Congress to take immediate and positive action to increase the number of commercial vessels operating under the U.S.-flag in order to increase the shipboard employment opportunities for American mariners. Absent such action, we as a nation will not only experience the continued outsourcing of American maritime jobs to the benefit of foreign maritime personnel but will also be forced to entrust a greater portion of the requisite commercial sealift readiness capability needed by the Department of Defense, along with the safety and supply of American troops, to foreign flag of convenience vessels and their foreign citizen crews.

To help begin to address and rectify this situation, we strongly urge your Committee to include provisions in your pending authorization legislation for the Maritime Administration that would establish a much-needed tanker security fleet modeled after and distinct from the Maritime Security Program and its maritime security fleet. As noted in a report released in February 2020 by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, "[the] Department of Defense faces a gap of approximately 76 fuel tankers to meet surge sealift requirements. A Tanker Security Program would be a rapid and cost-effective means to help address this gap . . ." Furthermore, establishing such a fleet would do nothing to expand the production of petroleum products, but simply reduce our military's reliance on foreign flag vessels by ensuring fuel is supplied and transported by American mariners on U.S. flag commercial vessels, consistent with the priorities of our national defense.

The report, "Strengthening the U.S. Defense Maritime Industrial Base," further noted that under such a Tanker Security Program, "militarily useful tankers would participate in the Voluntary Tanker Agreement, be equipped with capabilities for delivering fuel at sea via Consolidated Logistics tanking, and would carry crews trained to support military operations during contingencies."

As you know, since it was established in 1996, the Maritime Security Program has proven to be a critically important component of our nation's military security, providing the commercial sealift readiness capability, worldwide logistical resources, and civilian merchant mariners needed by the Department of Defense to protect and advance America's interests and to support American troops deployed around the world. We firmly believe that a similar Tanker Security Program can and will do the same.

We urge your Committee to authorize a tanker security fleet comprised of no less than ten vessels to be owned and operated by United States citizens, crewed by American citizen licensed and unlicensed merchant mariners, and operated under the United States-flag. We further urge that you authorize vessels participating in this program to receive a stipend that reflects the realities of the international petroleum product shipping trades and the fact that American vessel operators and crews are subject to U.S. government-imposed rules, regulations and tax obligations while their foreign competition is not. In addition, U.S. vessel operators provide jobs for American crews with the wages, benefits and safe working environments that all American workers have the right to expect, unlike what is provided to the foreign crews aboard foreign flag of convenience vessels. Consequently, as recommended by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment report, each tanker would need an annual stipend in the \$6 million - \$7.5 million range.

In November, 2018, Rear Admiral Dee Mewbourne, Commander, Military Sealift Command stated: "From Desert Storm to Bosnia, from Afghanistan to Operation Iraqi Freedom, America's Merchant Mariners continue to serve on the leading edge of our defense transportation system, carrying the combat equipment and supplies needed by our joint warfighters. To carry that logistics power to the fight, we have always relied on our Merchant Marine. And they have always answered the call. Despite the dangers and long separations from home, our U.S. Merchant Marine has sailed in harm's way time and time again to make sure that American warfighters and our allies have had the supplies they need to overwhelm our adversaries."

This proposed tanker fleet program offers a tremendous opportunity to not only increase the number of militarily useful vessels operating under the United States-flag to address the significant gap of approximately 76 fuel tankers required to meet DOD surge sealift requirements, but to create jobs for licensed and unlicensed American merchant mariners, helping to address and alleviate the current maritime manpower shortage. We again urge that your Committee act to end the outsourcing of American maritime jobs and to instead create jobs for American mariners through the establishment of a tanker security fleet program.

Sincerely,

Marshall Ainley, President, Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association

David Connolly, President, Sailors' Union of the Pacific

Paul Doell, President, American Maritime Officers

Daniel Duncan, Executive Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department.

Captain Donald J. Marcus, President, International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots

Michael Sacco, President, Seafarers International Union

Larry Willis, President, Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO