

Transportation Labor Demands Improved Global Safety Standards for Maritime Shipping

The tragic collapse of the Francis Scott Key (FSK) Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland, has highlighted the urgent need for stronger and vigorously enforced international maritime safety standards for cargo ships. Before the container ship MV Dali struck and destroyed the FSK Bridge, the Port of Baltimore played a crucial role in U.S. shipping routes, ranking as the country's ninth busiest port for international cargo. Last year, the port processed about 1 million containers, which translates to 11.7 million tons of cargo, making it one of the busiest ports in the nation by volume. The port handled a variety of goods daily, including construction materials, wood, steel, aluminum, appliances, furniture, sugar, liquefied natural gas, roughly 20% of coal exports, agricultural equipment, and automobiles. The accident has had significant financial impacts on the regional economy, the over 15,000 workers at the port, and the 140,000 workers whose jobs are indirectly supported by the port.

The collapse of the FSK Bridge is just another example of how current international maritime safety standards are inadequately enforced to the detriment of the workforce, supply chain, and national security of the United States. Additional policies must be implemented to ensure stronger international safety standards in the global maritime industry. It must also be understood that while many of these standards are appropriate as currently agreed to by international convention, they lack appropriate enforcement by flag states of vessel registration and by port state authorities around the world. This must change.

Standards must prioritize the safety of workers, the environment, and the goods being transported, which will help minimize accidents and safeguard workers' livelihoods. They must be fully enforced by port state authorities in the United States and around the world. Additionally, U.S. policies should continue to focus on investing in a thriving U.S. Merchant Marine, which will increase the capacity of the U.S. global supply chain, thereby decreasing our dependence on foreign-flag vessels that may or may not be meeting international standards. These policies include supporting and enforcing the Jones Act, increasing U.S. cargo preference requirements, and adequately appropriating the Maritime Security Program and Tanker Security Program every fiscal year.

We also want to acknowledge the quick action the American pilots took aboard the MV Dali. The steps taken by the Maryland pilots, members of the TTD-affiliated International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots, certainly helped to save lives, and their swift actions are a testament to their rigorous training and expertise. We commend them for performing at the highest industry standards under such devastating circumstances.

It's important to note that only 2% of the foreign trade of the United States is carried aboard U.S. flagged cargo vessels. The overwhelming majority of the ships in U.S. ports are foreign flagged, like the MV Dali. Further, many foreign-flagged ships are registered as flags of convenience carriers. Unfortunately, this means they often have poor safety standards regarding training mariners and inadequate licensing and credentialing requirements. Flag-of-convenience carriers are predatory models that benefit globalized shipping interests at the expense of American mariners and their jobs by encouraging the employment of the lowest cost available licensed and

unlicensed foreign mariners instead of Americans. The flag of convenience model rarely allows sufficient protection to international mariners who dare to prevent a ship from sailing in an unsafe condition. Under the globalized system that prevails in the industry today, international crews too often do not have the autonomy or job security to hold vessels at the dock until needed supplies or repairs are completed. This situation puts themselves, U.S. assets, and the safety of those in and around the port at risk. Companies that use these models are primarily interested in lowering business costs and increasing their profits, which poses a significant risk to the safety and welfare of global seafarers. Furthermore, this contributes to a decline in the critically important American maritime workforce.

As we review policies to prevent future bridge accidents, the nation's largest transportation labor federation demands that the United States mandate that all foreign ships entering its ports comply with proper safety, labor, and operating standards that meet minimum training and crewing requirements. This includes full enforcement of minimum safe manning and hours or work/rest requirements and correction of all material safety and engineering system deficiencies. In the ports of the United States, it is the responsibility of the U.S. Coast Guard to make sure this happens. The Coast Guard must have the personnel and funding necessary to accomplish their critical mission.

Additionally, to reduce the reliance on foreign goods and vessels, the United States must act affirmatively to increase the carriage of commercial goods and cargo on U.S.-flag, U.S.-built, U.S.-crewed vessels. This approach will create jobs for the middle class and better protect our domestic supply chain. We applaud the Biden administration and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) for investigating acts, policies, and practices of the People's Republic of China (PRC) that have targeted American maritime, logistics, and shipbuilding sectors.

Investing in the U.S. maritime industry and our American crews is a powerful strategy to strengthen our economy and domestic supply chain, crucial for our country's long-term prosperity and security.

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