

Mid-Term National Elections Crucial to Our Industry's Future



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Congressional elections will take place throughout the country on Tuesday, Nov. 2. The results will determine which political party will control the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2011 and 2012—and who will be in a position to determine whether or not our legislative agenda moves forward during the course of the next two years.

Our country is going through extremely difficult economic times. Unemployment is at its highest level since Ronald Reagan was President. For many middle class and working families, the threat of home foreclosure looms. At the same time, the political rancor and partisan bickering in Washington continues, and in Congress, too many people—in an attempt to further their own political agendas—are spending their time attacking, criticizing and blocking action rather than working together to improve the economic condition of the American people.

Notwithstanding the current state of affairs, we work tirelessly in support of our primary objective: to maintain and expand the number of U.S.-flag ships operating in our country's foreign and domestic shipping trades in order to keep our members working. To be successful, it is essential that we create and maintain a political environment that encourages rather than discourages the operation of U.S.-flag ships and supports rather than penalizes U.S.-flag vessel operations. Without a sufficient number of individuals in Congress to maintain the programs and policies that are critical to the U.S.-flag merchant marine, it will become harder—if not impossible—for U.S.-flag vessel operators to attract the financing they need to modernize and expand their fleets.

We need people in Congress who understand that U.S.-flag vessels and American mariners make our nation stronger and more secure. The availability of American vessels and crews gives U.S. troops stationed around the world and their families here at home the confidence of knowing that America's armed forces will be able to depend on their fellow citizen merchant mariners to deliver the supplies and equipment they need to fight on our behalf and to protect American interests abroad. The operation of a fleet of U.S.-flag ships keeps foreign-flag shipping interests from gaining total control over carriage of our country's foreign and domestic cargo—and with it the ability to subject our country to a form of economic blackmail.

So how can we achieve this result? What can we do to ensure that Congress is not controlled by people who want to repeal the Jones Act, eliminate U.S.-flag shipping cargo preference requirements and end the Maritime Security Program? What can we do to ensure that congressmen and senators who consistently oppose the interests of maritime labor do not run the committees that deal with our issues?

There are two primary things that each of us can and should do.

First, to those of you who already support the MM&P Political Contribution Fund, thank you! Your financial contribution to the MM&P PCF provides the resources necessary to support legislators who support the U.S.-flag merchant marine. *Please consider another contribution at this time.*

To those of you who have not yet contributed to the PCF: *please consider doing so now.* If every MM&P member does his or her part, and every member gives their fair share, the MM&P PCF will be stronger, and our effectiveness will be greater.

To those of you who have not yet contributed to the PCF, please consider doing so now.

If we don't vote our jobs on Election Day, then those who would abolish the Jones Act and put American mariners out of work will win.

Second, come Election Day, regardless of your political affiliation or philosophy, and regardless of where you stand on a range of important social issues, *Vote Your Job!*

When MM&P decides who should receive a contribution from the PCF, it doesn't matter if the individual is a Republican or a Democrat, a liberal or a conservative, an independent or a member of the Tea Party. The only thing that matters is where the individual stands on our issues. This is the only test MM&P uses when deciding whether to make a PCF contribution. And this should be the test each one of us uses when deciding for whom to vote on Nov. 2.

If we don't vote our jobs, then those who would deny American shipping companies the right to carry a portion of U.S.-taxpayer financed cargoes will win.

If we don't vote our jobs, then those who would end the Maritime Security Program and turn over defense and sealift-related functions to foreign-flagged, foreign-crewed vessels will win.

These are tough times for our country and for our industry, and too much of our legislative agenda for this Congress is still incomplete. We need more—not fewer—friends in Congress so we can address and resolve the problems created by the changes in the medical review process that are adversely affecting the license renewal process. Legislation sponsored by Congressmen Jim Oberstar (D-Minn.) and Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) to achieve this objective has passed the House of Representatives with our strong support but is, at this time, blocked in the Senate.

We need more—not fewer—friends in Congress so we can extend the authorization for the Maritime Security Program beyond its scheduled expiration in 2015. Legislation sponsored by Congressman Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) to achieve this objective has passed the House of Representatives with our strong support but is, at this time, blocked in the Senate.

We need more—not fewer—friends in Congress so we can put in place greater protections against piracy for American vessels and American crews. Legislation sponsored by Congressman Elijah Cummings to require the government to provide on-board security for U.S.-flag vessels in high-risk waters passed the House of Representatives with our strong support but was killed in the Senate.

We need more friends in Congress so we can end the practice of making mariners pay a fee to access terminals for shore leave; so we can end the taxation of mariners working in interstate commerce by states other than their state of residence; so we can end the double taxation of waterborne domestic cargo under the Harbor Maintenance Tax, which is blocking development of a marine highway system for short sea shipping; so we can stop government bureaucrats from refusing to apply U.S.-flag cargo preference requirements to U.S. government generated cargoes or from refusing to fully enforce the letter and the spirit of the domestic shipping statutes embodied in the Jones Act.

We need more friends in Congress so that we can finally provide the long-overdue recognition earned by America's World War II merchant mariners. Legislation sponsored by Congressman Bob Filner (D-Calif.) to extend this recognition passed the House of Representatives with our strong support but is, at this time, blocked in the Senate.

I strongly encourage you to click on the "Who We Support" link in the Members Only section of www.bridgedeck.org, where we have posted the names of congressmen and senators who have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with MM&P in the ongoing fight to protect the jobs of American maritime workers. If you have any questions about who is or isn't on the list, and the issues used to make the determinations, feel free to contact me at jpatti@miraid.org

If we stand together, we can and will succeed.