

Deep Water Port *notes*

The News Portfolio of The Connecticut Deep Water Port Community

New London . New Haven . Bridgeport

Maritime Matters in Washington

By Mr. Paul Bea



*Tanker High Strength bound for Nassau Bahamas after discharging cargo of gasoline in New Haven.
Picture by Connecticut Pilot Captain Charles P. Jonas*

Two acronyms to keep an eye on in the next months: WRDA and MARAD. The first of those is a promising sign that Congress will produce its first Water Resources Development Act since George W. Bush signed a similar projects and policy measure in 2007. The second is a hopeful agency planning a public outreach focused on restoring the U.S. merchant marine.

In January of this year the chairs of the House and Senate public works committees said that producing WRDA bills was tops on their respective to-do lists. And as legislators prepared for the Thanksgiving recess—such breaks referred to in Washingtonese as district work periods—Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Congressman Bill Shuster (R-PA) convened a joint conference committee that will distill two measures (S. 601 and H.R. 3080) into a single version for final congressional action and a presidential signature.

WRDA 2013, as we shall call it, has a definite reform theme due in part to the paucity of provisions having to do with named projects. This is the no-earmark era in Washington. Instead of bills filled with a variety of navigation, flood control and beach replenishment project provisions they are heavy with policy and process changes. Instead of the appearance of a project in every district, the objective was to improve how government works, looks, and costs...in addition to advancing some Corps of Engineers projects.

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In the House where a good many conservative and freshmen Members had little understanding of or appreciation for the government role in water projects, special attention was paid by Chairman Shuster to both educating those legislators and casting the bill as a means to change the cost and complication of government. Note the bill's name: the Water Resources Reform & Development Act, or WRRDA. Note also how Shuster employed video animation to explain WRRDA benefits to the economy in terms of cutting red tape and dredging ports to be globally competitive.

Chances are good that early in 2014, if not late in December 2013, House and Senate conferees will report a final measure. In addition to "streamlining" project reviews and altering the civil works process, WRDA 2013 will enable Federal channel projects to advance in Savannah, Freeport, TX and Jacksonville and clear up issues that are in the way of other navigation projects. And while limited progress in other respects, including finding a solution to the under-utilization of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, the bill will be hailed as a significant accomplishment in a time known for government shutdowns and acrimonious partisanship. It will be said that Congress can still produce jobs and infrastructure bills in cooperation with an Obama White House. And that would be true.

As for MARAD, the U.S. DOT agency has scheduled a National Maritime Strategy Symposium: Cargo Opportunities and Sealift Capacity for January 14-16. It has solicited recommendations from stakeholders as to items and ideas to put on the agenda. The published notice invites ideas that could include terminal and vessel operations, emissions and efficiencies, workforce training and supply chain improvements. As wide ranging as those areas are, the objective boils down to showing Congress and stakeholders that attempts are being made to arrive at steps, within the confines of current Federal

policy, to reverse the dwindling presence of the U.S. flag on blue water. Paul Bea is a government relations and policy advisor in Washington, DC. He chairs the marine highway advocacy group, The Coastwise Coalition, and discusses marine transportation system matters at www.MTSMatters.com.

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