

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



Freighter Pannonia G, enroute for New Haven to load scrap metal bound for Turkey. Photo by Connecticut Senior Pilot Captain Charles P. Jonas

Republicans will hold the reins of Congress come January. They improved their majority in the House and earned the majority in the Senate with as many as 54 seats, depending on the final counts in Alaska and Louisiana. Over the coming months we will learn who are made party leaders for the coming 114th Congress as well as the names to inhabit chairmanships, ranking minority posts, and committee lists.

Long before Election Day the US-flag maritime community had nervously eyed poll results because of what a Republican return to power in the Senate could mean. Now the controlling party is known and how that will be reflected in maritime related legislation may soon be learned.

One can easily find Republican legislators who are considered friends of the US maritime industry, whether driven by their interest in US-flag cargo preference policy, shipyard activity, the labor force, or other sectors that benefit by existing policy. But that doesn't mean that in the months approaching the election the maritime community in Washington, DC was sanguine or unconcerned about the prospect of the GOP taking the lead in producing legislation.

The community has been frustrated with the Obama Administration's willingness to ease cargo preference requirements. Now, potentially as problematic, Republican legislators who, for philosophical or constituency reasons have not been inclined to extend Ex-Im Bank authorization or fund cargo preference policy—both key issues for the US merchant marine—will have more influence in policy setting. Add to that the fact that congressional support for the Jones Act is lacking in some quarters where the marketplace is revered and shipper interests—including domestic petroleum producers—would exchange the US flag for lower vessel costs.



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A few years ago Jones Act and US-flag interests started Maritime Industry Congressional Sail-In Day to lobby the Hill with a particular aim to educate legislators who are new to maritime issues. The old guard who recall there once was a House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee—soon 20 years defunct—is nearly gone from Congress as a consequence of natural and electoral attrition.

More recent Republican additions to Capitol Hill are a decidedly more conservative population—some of them Libertarians and self-identified tea partiers—who are more market- and less government-oriented. They arrive in Washington with little knowledge of the American maritime tradition and even less of its policy.

On the Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee are Marco Rubio (R-FL), Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Ron Johnson (R-WI) who, for example, have opposed reauthorizing the Ex-Im Bank (“corporate welfare”) and could be in the mix to chair the subcommittee with jurisdiction over maritime policy. Veteran John McCain (R-AZ), the likely next chair of the Armed Services Committee, has a record of proposing the repeal of the Jones Act. Referring to a McCain quote in a Wall

Street Journal blog, a union newsletter carries this heading: “Sen. John McCain Calls Jones Act’s National Security Benefits Laughable.”

Maybe change is coming, maybe not. If anything we may see more jousting on US maritime policy.

Paul Bea is a government relations and policy advisor in Washington, DC. He discusses marine transportation system matters at www.MTSmatters.com.

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Joseph Gilbert, 203.876.8923, hiddenemp@aol.com

Bridgeport Landing Development LLC.

Robert Christoph Jr., 305-672-5588, rwjcr@rcimarine.com

Bridgeport Port Authority

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David Pohorylo, 203-467-2423, dpohorylo@newenglandshipping.com

New Haven Port Authority

Judi Sheiffele, Ex.Dir., 203-946-6778, JSheiffe@newhavenct.net

New Haven Terminal

Michael Vasaturo, 203-468-0805, vpusec@aol.com

Port Security Services

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William Gash, Executive Director

P.O. Box 188, Stonington, CT 06378 Phone: 860-941-0044

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Designed by Casey Gash, caseycyrgash@live.com

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