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The Connecticut Maritime Coalition is a non-profit trade association facilitating the competitiveness of Connecticut's maritime industries. Our member network is mostly composed of small and medium-sized businesses.

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William Gash, Executive Director

P.O. Box 188, Stonington, CT 06378 Phone: 860-941-0044
Fax (888) 436-5413 Email: ctmaritime@msn.com

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Deep Water Port *notes*

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Deep Water Port *notes*

The News Portfolio of The Connecticut Deep Water Port Community
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Maritime Matters in Washington

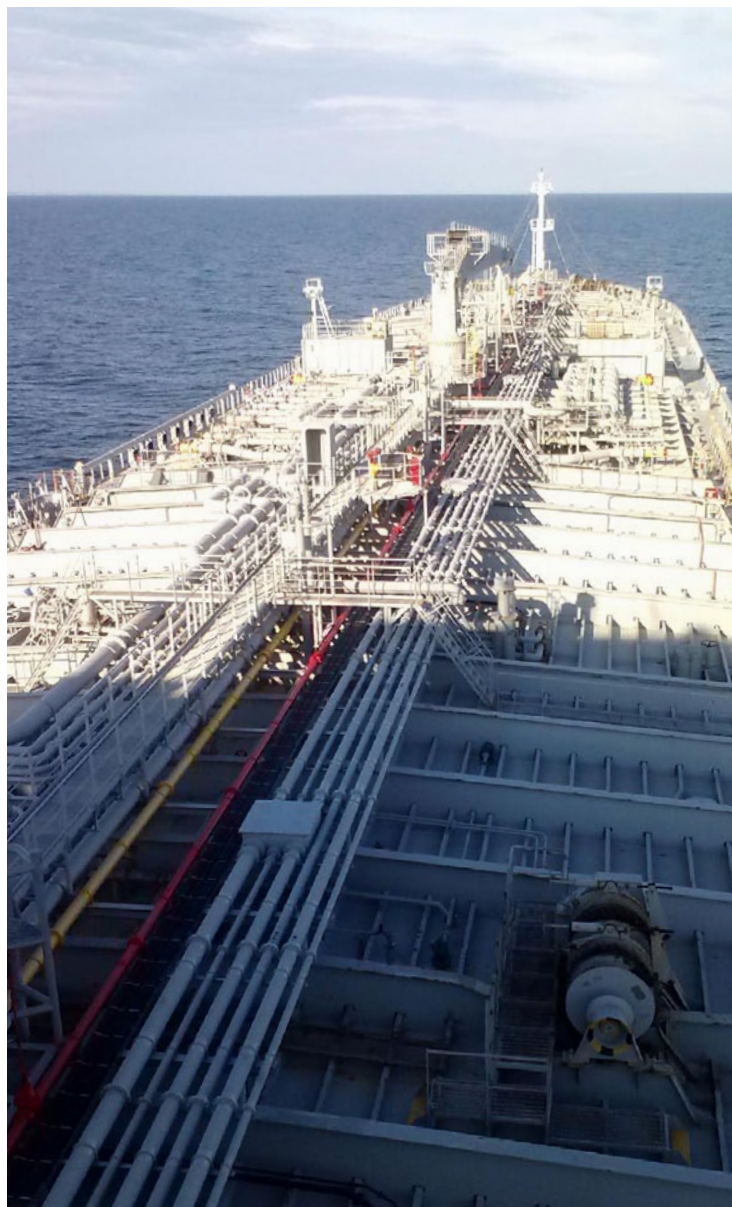
by Mr. Paul Bea

Summer is on the wane. The same might be said of the current administration in Washington and the 114th Congress, both timing out at or soon after the end of the year. And, as of this writing, the 2016 presidential campaign period ends in 77 days. All of which means we are entering a familiar, but critical period in governing. It is decision time for all: What can we get done in the time remaining? What will be the lasting impression and effect of this congress, this presidency, this election?

I won't try to speculate on the last of those. Besides, nary a whisper has been heard on the stump about the port/maritime sector. Instead, here are some thoughts on two matters pending and percolating in the two branches of government.

National Maritime Transportation Strategy. From the start, some people scoffed at the idea of preparing such a document. The Maritime Administrator was sincere when he started a public thought-process in January 2014. It was to culminate, a year later, in a document that could give direction to US activity and, in the process, highlight policy areas that could use attention and support. But there was plenty of skepticism that higher-ups in the department and in the White House would care when the draft came their way and they picked up red pencils. For that matter, some people in the maritime sector itself were less than enthusiastic for reasons that they would have to explain and helped the process little.

Today, the still unpublished draft document is near the end of the process, albeit months in "interagency review." (With around 20 agencies and departments having some interest in ports and shipping maritime one might imagine that by this time there are 20 red pencils worn dull.) Having been put through many wringers over nearly two years in offices where US maritime policy is little considered, it is anyone's guess as to the document's value for the port/maritime sector. The most that we, and Administrator Chip Jaenichen, can hope for is that the final draft will be released for comment before the administration loses its license to operate. It could be useful to have a "maritime strategy" document circulating among the policy planners and makers who will run the government starting in 2017. If anything it could spark someone's attention to a subject area that has been easily ignored and misunderstood at higher levels of government. They could benefit by reading about the need for investing in ports, preparing the transportation system for the effects of larger ships, adapting technology, growing domestic maritime service, and preparing the next skilled workforce. That is what the document is about.



750 foot Tanker Strofades. Offloaded No.6 fuel oil at Riverhead, Long Island, outbound Long Island Sound for St Croix, Virgin Islands. Picture by Senior Connecticut State Pilot Captain Charles P. Jonas.



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Water Resources Development Act of 2016 (WRDA 2016). It is possible that Congress will complete action on a WRDA bill. But with a month of legislative days left before the election break, and an unspecific period for an unpredictable lame duck session following the election, much can get in the way of bill completion. Committee leaders want to demonstrate that they can send a WRDA bill to the White House just two years after the 2014 act and provide some biennial predictability to authorizing water resource projects like navigation and flood control improvements. The port/maritime sector has a lot at stake in this bill, which would authorize the Corps of Engineers to undertake Portsmouth, Charleston, Ft. Lauderdale, and Brazos Island deepening projects. Those ports have been waiting for this step to be taken. If the bill dies this year, it could be another two years before another is done.

The House and Senate versions of the bill contain a large number of policy provisions that would improve the much bemoaned Corps'

civil works process, strengthen the leverage of ports in the study and implementation phases of Federal navigation projects, and, overtime, improve channel maintenance funding. Space allows me to cover the last and most consequential of those. It is a provision in the House bill, H.R.5303, that not only would lead to full use of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund but also enable direct funding of the Corps for maintenance work. For reasons explained by arcane congressional budget rules, the legislation would make that happen eleven years following enactment. Would it be worth the wait? Put it this way: Ports have waited since 1986 for the trust fund to be taken "off-budget" and protected from being used to balance against deficit spending in the larger Federal budget.

Paul Bea is a government relations and policy advisor in Washington, DC. He can be found at www.phbpa.com.

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Organized in 2000, the Connecticut Maritime Coalition is a non-profit trade association advocating for Connecticut's Maritime Industry.

Our members include:

Briarpatch Enterprises, Inc.

Joseph Gilbert, 203.876.8923, hiddenemp@aol.com

Bridgeport Landing Development LLC.

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

Bridgeport Port Authority

Andrew J. Nunn, 203-576-3964, andrew.nunn@bridgeportct.gov

The Bridgeport & Port Jefferson Steamboat Company

Frederick Hall, 631-473-0286, FHall@McAllisterTowing.com

Blakeslee Arpaia Chapman, Inc.

John Fucci, 203-483-2954, jfucci@BAC-INC.com

Cross Sound Ferry Services, Inc.

Adam Wronowski, 860-625-4824, adam@longislandferry.com

Connecticut Maritime Association, Inc.

Donald Frost, 203-406-0106, dbfrost@optonline.net

Connecticut State Pilots, Inc.

Capt. Charles Jonas, 516-319-5069, cponas@optonline.net

DRVN Enterprises Inc.

Steve Farrelly, 860-989-8081, drvn39@yahoo.com

Empire Fisheries, LLC

Joseph Gilbert, 203-876-8923, hiddenemp@aol.com

Gateway Terminal

Tom Dubno, 203-467-1997, tdubno@gatewayt.com

GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc.

Dan Kinard, 860-286-8900, dan.kinard@gza.com

Industrial Search Partners

P. Jason Ward, 203-354-8176, jward@industrialsearchpartners.com

Interport Pilots Agency, Inc.

Captain Louis Bettinelli, 732-787-5554, loubett@optonline.net

Logistec Inc.

Jeremy Riddle, 860-444-1329, jriddle@logistec.com

MOHAWK Northeast Inc.

Mike Heinke, 860-445-7401, MHeinke@mohawknortheast.com

Moran Towing Corporation

Aislinn Pitchford, 203-442-2800, aislinn@morantug.com

New England Shipping Company, Inc.

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

Ralph Gogliettino, 800-762-9147, Ralph@portsecurity.us

Santa Energy Corporation

Thomas Santa, 203-362-3332, SantaT@santaenergy.com

Sea Support, Inc.

Ralph Gogliettino, 203-467-1590, Ralph@seasupport.biz

Thames Towboat Co.

Richard MacMurray, 860-443-7394, rich@longislandferry.com

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Stan Mickus, 860-460-8437, stanmickus@longislandferry.com

Underwater Construction Corporation

Philip G. McDermott, 860.767.8256, pmcdermott@uccdive.com

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