

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

About a year ago, I reported on the first eight months of the Trump Administration and the two-year Congress. A year later, the Administration has more of a record to examine and most legislators are campaigning in the hope of being re-elected in November. The election will be followed by the final weeks of the 115th Congress. So, what has been accomplished?

Tax reform and infrastructure were principal objectives of the Administration. Only the former was accomplished. Congress, including Democrats, was eager to work on an infrastructure initiative, but fully a year passed before the promised initiative was sent to Capitol Hill. By the time the proposal was released in February 2018, expectations had lowered and enthusiasm in Congress and among public and private sector stakeholders had diminished. Many stakeholders liked the proposals for streamlining Federal procedures, but the White House proposed only \$200 billion in spending for a ten-year program that was supposed to bring in \$1.5 trillion worth of construction. Most observers doubted the proposed incentives for public-private partnerships and other investments would fulfill the promise. Democrats would not get the greater cash commitment they wanted from the Republicans.

Adding further to the slow delivery of a program, the White House did not produce a legislative proposal, only an outline, thus putting on Congress the burden of translating White House ideas into legislative language. Moreover, the President wanted Congress to figure out how to cover the cost of a \$200 billion outlay while, at the same time proposing budget reductions for some existing infrastructure programs.

Putting aside disappointment in the White House initiative, 2018 has been "a remarkable year," as a friend at the American Association of Port Authorities recently declared. His enthusiasm is explained, in part, because of successes relating to the Corps' Civil Works program. The President will sign the Water Resources Development Act of 2018 (WRDA) as part of a broader water infrastructure bill. The Civil Works program relies on biennial WRDA bills to authorize navigation and other water projects. The program is equally reliant on Federal dollars to implement projects and the FY2019 Energy & Water Development Appropriations bill was one



Tanker MT Ardmore Seamariner Inbound New Haven Delivering 80 Thousand Barrels of Gasoline. Photo by CT State Pilot Captain Sean Meade.

of the few spending bills to be made law in time for the new fiscal year, the first time since 2004. Notwithstanding the President's lowball budget request, the bill also is notable for including record levels of funding for the Civil Works program and navigation channel maintenance. Congress doubled the President's request for coastal navigation for a total of \$2.083 billion, including \$1.54 billion in spending from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. The latter figure amounts to 91 percent of the estimated Harbor Maintenance Tax revenue of the past year. Again, a record.

A smaller bill that is focused only on port infrastructure emerged from a Senate committee in recent months. Roger Wicker (R-MS) introduced a bill to create a competitive grants program for port-related improvements inside and outside terminal areas. While it has key support, his "Port Operations, Research, and Technology Act" may not get through the Senate this year. If not, he is likely to reintroduce it reintroduce it in January.

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The Connecticut Maritime Coalition Welcomes New Member RACE Coastal Engineering

Founded in 1999, RACE Coastal Engineering provides coastal, structural, geotechnical and regulatory consultation and design to residents, recreational facilities, municipalities and commercial properties throughout the Northeast and beyond. RACE was nationally recognized by the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) for its innovative approach to the Steelpointe Harbor Waterfront Project in Bridgeport, CT. To learn more about RACE, call 203-377-0663 or visit <https://www.racecoastal.com/>.



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While there is not a substantial history of maritime-related accomplishments over these two years, there are clear signs the Trump Administration is showing greater interest in the maritime sector than did his recent predecessors. The President is on record wanting a 350-ship Navy and has supported, with Congress, the construction of new ice breakers and maritime academy training vessels. We have reason to expect MARAD's National Maritime Transportation Strategy will be cleared for Congress this year. White House trade and national security staff have shown strong interest in the maritime sector, especially vessels under US flag. Signs also point to support in the White House for the marine highway program. To date, Trump initiatives are primarily US flag and shipbuilding oriented, and to less on ports.

The White House focus on cutting regulation, procedures and project delivery time is visible in many parts of government. Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) R.D. James summed it up in a video address to his employees: they have been given strong funding levels and their job is to "move dirt now." He called on the Corps, known for its bureaucratic ways, to embrace a "cultural change at all levels." "Merely executing the program will not be condoned," he said,

telling them to accomplish their work by" getting out of our own way, overcoming meaningless processes, and making smart, risk-informed decisions." If you don't measure up, he concluded, you will lose your money to others who will.

As for the principal civilian maritime agencies, the Maritime Administration and the Federal Maritime Commission, we have seen some difference with past administrations. MARAD has a good relationship with the Office of the Secretary and, by extension, the White House. That was expected of Secretary Elaine Chao and her own maritime background and political connections. In contrast, the FMC does not appear to be on White House radar. The five-seat independent commission, which is visibly following the President's lead in looking to reduce regulation and be productive, is down to two commissioners since July. There is no indication the White House is lining up nominees to fill the two Democrat and one Republican vacancies. It is a small and sometimes neglected agency, but nearly two years into an administration, one would expect some of those filled sooner than later.

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

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DWPN is published quarterly by the Connecticut Maritime Coalition, Inc. Design by Casey Gash

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