

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 4, 2017

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2358-A Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Price
Ranking Member
Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2358-A Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Price,

We thank you for your past support for the State Maritime Academies (SMAs) and urge you to move forward with full funding for the final design and contracting for America's National Security Multi-mission Vessels (NSMVs) to replace the current fleet of aging vessels used to train U.S. mariners. Not only will NSMVs be used by the nation's six State Maritime Academies (SMAs) to train new mariners, they will also be purpose-built for disaster assistance and humanitarian aid during times of national need. With the existing vessels nearing the end of their useful life, it is imperative that the Maritime Administration have the resources it needs to replace them expeditiously. Congress provided NSMV design funding over the past two years, and the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2017* included language authorizing \$36 million to begin contracting construction. We therefore ask that you include a fully-funded NSMV program in your Fiscal Year 2018 appropriations bill.

The maritime industry is an essential part of our nation's economy and plays a critical role in national security. Each year, the industry creates over \$100 billion in output, employing 1.5 million Americans and paying tens of billions in wages and benefits. Yet, often overlooked is how much our national security depends on civilian mariners, who provide logistical support for our operational and deployed forces. Years ago, the Department of Defense adopted a policy of relying heavily on commercial ships and civilian crews for military sealift to war zones around the world. The use of commercial vessels and mariners to move military cargo saves the U.S. government billions of dollars each year while providing a steady stream of good-paying jobs.

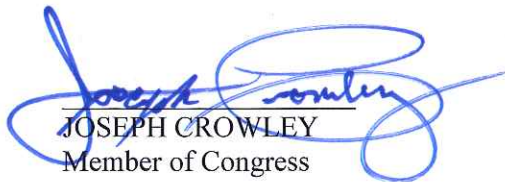
However, these benefits to our national security and economy will be at risk if the training ships are not replaced. The six State Maritime Academies produce over 70 percent of U.S. licensed Coast Guard officers each year and an even larger proportion of U.S. civilian mariners. The NSMVs will be an essential part of the SMA curriculum, as cadets must receive 360 days of sea time for graduation and licensure. But the capacity for adequate training is in jeopardy. The Texas A&M Maritime Academy training ship, the TS General Rudder, is inadequate for its mission, which has resulted in the only maritime academy in the Gulf of Mexico having to send cadets to other academies for training. Furthermore, as of this September, the nation's two largest training vessels will come critically close to the end of their useful life – the TS Empire State will have been in service for 56 years, and the TS Kennedy, launched in 1967, is not far behind. Losing either of these ships will have a devastating impact on the mariner pipeline at a time when we are already unable to meet the projected need for mariners. Failure to address this problem will inevitably result in a weakened U.S. economy and will significantly diminish our military sealift capacity.

According to a report on our future transportation workforce released in August 2015 by the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Transportation, there will be a need for approximately 40,000 new U.S. Coast Guard credentialed captains, mates, pilots, and ship engineers between 2012 and 2022. That is a challenging target under the best of circumstances, not to mention when at-sea training is critically compromised. Recently, Gen. Darren W. McDew, Commander U.S. Transportation Command, who oversees military sealift, spoke to the critical role that commercial mariners play in national security and

expressed his concern regarding the availability of mariners to meet critical needs. Gen. McDew said that the nation's ability to project a force with sealift in a manner similar to Desert Storm 25 years ago is no longer guaranteed due to a dwindling pool of American mariners. McDew said, "If the U.S. mariner base gets too small, we will have to rely on other countries to deploy our combat power." That possibility, he said, is only more worrisome as, "the global security environment is only getting more contested."

Our country is facing an urgent need to address the recapitalization of our training ships. Doing so would not only bolster our economy, but it would also strengthen our military readiness and shore up our resilience and responsiveness during natural disasters. We therefore urge you to support investment in our mariners, our economy and our national security by fully funding the National Security Multi-mission Vessel program in FY2018. We look forward to working with you in order to sustain the mission of our State Maritime Academies.

Sincerely,



JOSEPH CROWLEY
Member of Congress



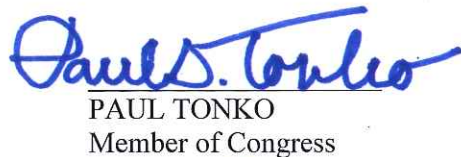
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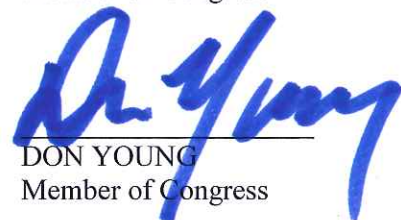
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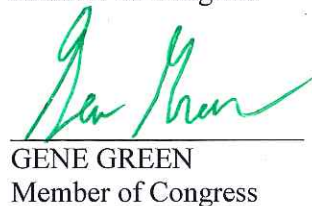
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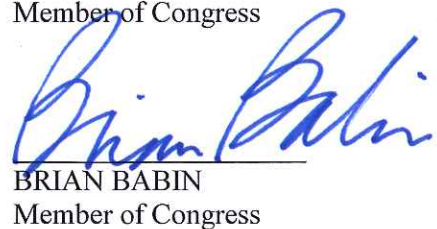
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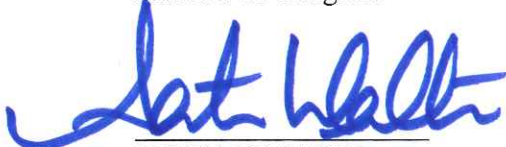
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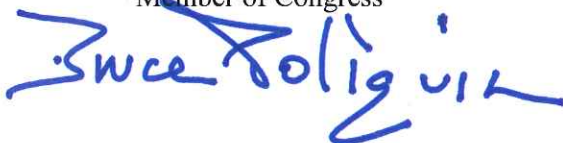
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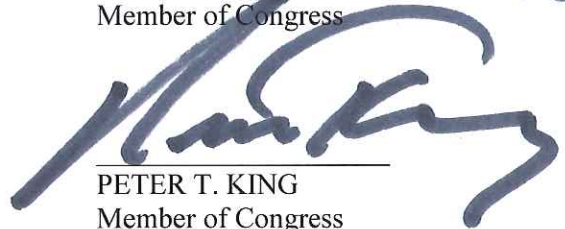
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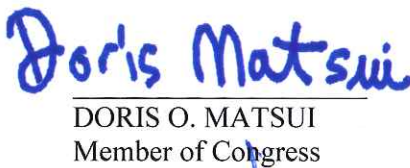
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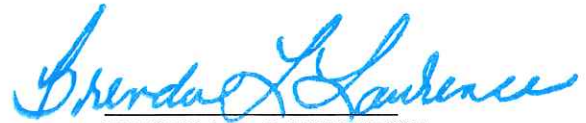
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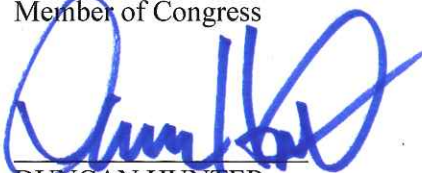
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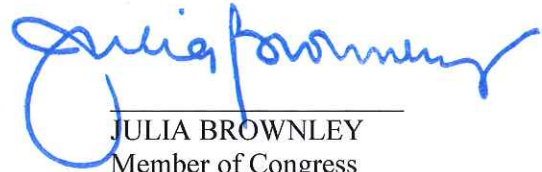
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