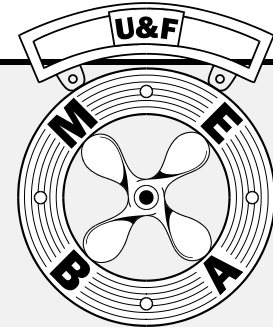


LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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MarAd's Buzby Delivers Progress Report on National Maritime Strategy

In early December, Maritime Administrator Rear Admiral Mark Buzby told a House Subcommittee that his agency is still working on the the long-awaited National Maritime Strategy (NMS) and that the mariner workforce will be a “grand part” of the forthcoming strategy. “The training of that workforce, the qualifications of that workforce, the sustainment of that workforce - both for the domestic fleet and for the international fleet – those are all key parts of the strategy and will need to be part of any strategy we put forward,” he testified.

The Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee, part of the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, heard from Adm. Buzby in a morning hearing that also included witnesses briefing Members about the Coast Guard’s icebreaker acquisition program.

As envisioned, the NMS would offer a path forward to improve the competitiveness of the U.S.-flag fleet to meet the nation’s economic and defense needs. The Strategy was originally expected in 2015 but the multi-faceted plan eventually became trapped in limbo at the Office of Management and Budget. It finally disappeared from view with the 2016 Presidential election and change of administration. When Admiral Buzby took over MarAd, he told Congress that he planned to resurrect the moribund plan and “get it across the finish line.”

The FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act extended the deadline for NMS submission to February 2020. Admiral Buzby said his agency is using the additional time to further collaborate with public and private stakeholders to ensure all voices are heard and to better refine NMS goals.

Regarding icebreakers, Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) said the problem could be solved in the next two weeks if Congress is prudent in its allocation of the money it will earmark as the chambers work on funding bills before the conclusion of this session of Congress. He pointed out that Senate appropriators plan to include \$750 million for the first of the needed polar security cutters. However, he noted that the House doesn’t have a comparable provision in their bill but but could possibly appropriate \$5 billion “on a goddamned wall that won’t do a thing to protect America...”

“The problem is us,” said Rep. Garamendi. “The money is there, the question is where are we gonna spend it?”

Regarding the need to jumpstart U.S. shipping, Rep. Garamendi referred to witness testimony that correlated the downturn of U.S. shipping with the decline of cargoes. He took the opportunity to promote his bill, the “Energizing American Shipbuilding Act,” that would require a percentage of exported American crude oil and LNG to travel on U.S.-built and U.S.-flag ships.

He admitted the legislation wouldn't pass this year but will be introduced in the next session of Congress and should be embraced. He blamed OMB for stalling the issuance of the NMS and called for OMB Director Mick Mulvaney to be subpoenaed before Congress to answer tough questions about it.

A witness for the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) cited concerns that the continued erosion of the U.S.-flag fleet and shrinking pool of qualified American mariners threatens the nation's ability to meet national defense needs. This last summer, GAO urged the Department of Transportation to expeditiously finalize the NMS.