

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer,

Thank you for your leadership in handling this unprecedented crisis. While Congress has acted boldly to provide relief for the American people, there is more work to be done. As you continue to negotiate future legislation related to the COVID-19 crisis, I urge you to consider several actions related to the Maritime Security Program.

The Maritime Security Program (MSP) provides military access to a versatile fleet of government-owned or controlled and privately-owned U.S. flag vessels. This fleet is ready to meet national defense needs and supports a global transportation network. These vessels are incentivized to participate through a stipend but must satisfy certain requirements. Due to the global trade disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, some ships in this fleet may fail to meet the operating days requirement to receive the stipend. It would be prudent to reduce the operating days requirement so vessels can continue to be eligible for the MSP stipend and contribute to our national security readiness.

I would also recommend making operators eligible for additional payments from the MSP to cover the cost of maintaining the vessel and keeping the crew employed. To further support crews and help them get back to work, Congress should devise to provide COVID-19 testing kits for mariners aboard U.S.-flag vessels and allowing maritime union vocational training facilities to be eligible to apply for assistance under the Paycheck Protection Program.

As businesses across our nation are facing hardship, the federal government should take advantage of all opportunities to support American businesses and workers. To support MSP participants, all government generated cargoes should have 100% U.S.-flag cargo preference. I also urge you to reject any waivers of the Jones Act for the duration of this pandemic.

The crews of U.S.-flagged vessels support our nation in our times of need, and we must do the same to ensure these critical national security assets remain ready and in business after this crisis ends. I appreciate your consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elaine G. Luria". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "E" and a long, sweeping tail.

Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress