



February 26, 2021

The Honorable Joseph Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

During the course of the Presidential campaign and most recently through the release of your January 25, 2021 Buy America Executive Order, you have expressed strong support for the United States-flag maritime industry and for the American merchant mariners who crew these vessels. As you stated in a letter to our unions in May 2020: ***“the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine fleet and the men and women who operate U.S.-flag ships are crucial to America’s national security, our international trade relationships, and economic development.”***

We greatly appreciate your comments and support, and in particular, the specific reference in your Buy America Executive Order to the Jones Act, a cornerstone of American maritime policy. In fact, no Presidential candidate in the last fifty years has been as direct and as forceful in support of our industry as you. We believe that with your leadership and support, and with the support of Members of Congress, we now have the opportunity to develop an effective national maritime policy that increases the number of vessels operating under the U.S.-flag, the amount of cargo carried aboard U.S.-flag ships, and the number of jobs for American merchant mariners.

As you have stated, ***“merchant ships do not sail, and U.S. merchant mariners do not work, unless they have cargo to carry.”*** One way to ensure that American vessels have the base of cargo they need to operate is through our nation’s U.S.-flag cargo preference shipping laws. Consequently, we ask your support for legislation that increases the percentage of non-defense U.S. government generated cargoes reserved for U.S.-flag vessels from the current 50 percent to 100 percent to match the requirement already applicable to the carriage of defense cargoes. This

increase will reflect the policy you enunciated in July 2020: *"When we spend taxpayers' money, when the Federal government spends taxpayers' money, we should use it to buy American products and support American jobs."*

In addition to increasing and enforcing cargo preference, we look forward to working with your Administration and with Members of Congress to include language in the next tax legislation that will achieve greater participation by U.S.-flag vessels in the carriage of America's foreign trade. Specifically, a program that offers tax incentives to those who transport their cargoes on U.S.-flag vessels could help narrow the gap between the cost of using U.S.-flag ships and the cost of using substandard foreign flag of convenience vessels with foreign citizen crews. We ask your support for this effort.

Also, we ask your Administration to consider the negotiation of cargo sharing agreements with our nation's trading partners. Reserving a portion of the trade moving between the United States and another nation to the vessels of both nations is a legitimate and effective means to increase the amount of cargo transported by U.S.-flag ships and thereby the number of American maritime jobs.

Finally, the recently enacted Fiscal Year 2021 defense authorizations legislation establishes a new Tanker Security Fleet program comprised of ten privately-owned commercial U.S.-flag product tankers. This program will help alleviate the Department of Defense reliance on foreign flag tankers by providing DOD with assured access to U.S.-flag, U.S.-crewed vessels for its fuel supply needs. We ask that you include full FY'22 funding for this program in your budget submission to Congress and to work with us and Congress to ensure these vessels have the cargo they need to operate and to put American mariners to work.

During the course of your campaign you expressed strong support for the Maritime Security Program (MSP), and for full funding for MSP at its authorized level. As you stated, *"We must have a modern fleet to help us address modern threats in several regions of the world. The MSP must be secured if America is going to remain secure."* We ask that you include funding for MSP at its Congressionally-authorized level for FY'22 in your budget submission to Congress.

Despite an unparalleled record of service to our country the continued viability of our industry is at risk. As a result of the growth of foreign state owned-and controlled merchant fleets, especially that of the People's Republic of China; the proliferation of foreign flag of convenience operations; the ability of foreign flag fleets to operate in tax and regulation free environments; and the refusal of many

foreign flag vessel owners and operators to provide their crews with even the most basic labor standards, it is extremely difficult for U.S.-flag vessels with American crews to compete for cargo. The reality is that less than 2 percent of America's foreign trade is carried on our ships, resulting in a precipitous decline in the number of U.S.-flag ships engaged in the international trades with a corresponding decline in the strategically important civilian mariner manpower pool.

You have made clear that our country has *“a moral obligation to rebuild the middle class”* As you have stated, *“We’ll get it done, in part, by investing in the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine You’ve fought hard, with my support, to make your members’ jobs into good-quality middle-class jobs. I want you to know that I will continue the fight alongside you when I am in the White House.”*

We stand ready to work with you, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, Acting Maritime Administrator Lucinda Lessley and others in your Administration to develop policies and programs that increase jobs for American maritime workers.

Respectfully submitted,

David Connolly
President
Sailors Union of the Pacific

Paul Doell
President
American Maritime Officers

Don Marcus
President
International Organization of Masters,
Mates and Pilots

Anthony Poplawski
President
Marine Firemen, Oilers,
Watertenders and Wipers

Michael Sacco
President
Seafarers International Union

Adam Vokac
President
Marine Engineers’ Beneficial
Association

cc: The Honorable Kamala Harris, Vice President of the United States
The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary, Department of Transportation
The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary, Department of Treasury
The Honorable Marty Walsh, Secretary, Department of Labor

The Honorable Brian Deese, Director, National Economic Council
The Honorable Katherine Tai, United States Trade Representative