

Rep. John Garamendi
Opening Statement
House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Hearing

“Maritime Transportation: The Role of U.S. Ships and Mariners”

May 21, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling this morning’s hearing to examine the status and role of the U.S. merchant marine within the Marine Transportation System. Such an examination is both overdue and important.

Tomorrow is National Maritime Day. Since its establishment in 1933, we pause on May 22 to recognize the many selfless contributions made by the men and women of the U.S. merchant marine, past and present, in meeting our country's economic and security needs, in both wartime and in peace. Such recognition is well-deserved and appreciated by a grateful nation.

Yet despite the luminous history of the U.S. Merchant Marine, the current challenges facing the U.S. maritime industry portend a future that offers anything but smooth sailing.

Today, the U.S. flagged oceangoing fleet in the foreign trade is comprised of fewer than 100 ships, a decline of over 80 percent from the 1979 fleet level of 576 vessels. As a result, of the 78 percent of U.S. exports and imports transported by water, less than 1.5 percent is carried under the U.S. flag.

The U.S. coastwise fleet has fared better and continues to provide vital marine transportation within U.S. coastal waters and inland waterways. Nevertheless, the Jones continues to come under attack by critics despite the fact that the Jones Act trades constitute a substantial component of U.S. shipyard activity, a necessity to maintain our national defense capability.

Cargo preference requirements continue to be whittled away if not ignored by Federal agencies as if these requirements were a hindrance and not the law of the land. Not only does this reduce the number of job opportunities for U.S. seafarers, it denies important cargoes to U.S. carriers which also provide invaluable sealift capabilities when our armed services are deployed abroad.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, on National Maritime Day it is important that we celebrate our maritime heritage. But this year, we would be wise to examine how we can reinvigorate the U.S. flagged fleet, what we might do to rebuild and expand U.S. shipbuilding capacity, and what we can do to ensure that maritime transportation remains prominent in the discussion of our national freight policy? I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and beginning that discussion. Thank you.