

Senate Releases MARAD Bill



JUNE 3, 2019

On May 29, 2019, the Senate Commerce Committee released to the public its [draft bill](#) to reauthorize the Maritime Administration (MARAD), S. 1417. In addition to reauthorizing most of the programs administered by MARAD, the bill includes a few new nuggets worth examining.

The bill features a new ports grant program titled the “Ports Improvement Act”. Subject to appropriations, the program would provide state and local governments with funds to improve ports, focusing on marine terminal equipment, intermodal infrastructure, and dredging. Projects must be cost-effective and improve safety, efficiency, or reliability of the movement of goods through a port or intermodal connection to a port. Additionally, projects selected to receive grants will be those which cannot be completed without Federal funding, but the Federal share of costs generally will not exceed 80% or 50% for dredging projects.

Additionally, the legislation would create a new program to develop strategic sealift readiness ports, jointly administered by MARAD and the U.S. Transportation Command. Eligible ports will be those that DOD designates as strategic seaports supporting deployment of U.S. forces. Under the program, a new “Strategic Seaport Readiness Infrastructure Fund” would be established within the Treasury. Funds would be used to upgrade piers and wharfs for heavy lift, increase efficiency and readiness, upgrade intermodal infrastructure, and provide cyber resiliency.

The legislation would establish a “military to mariner” program by helping smooth the way for sea service members with relevant experience transition into commercial and government maritime employment. It would acknowledge the skills the developed in the service and allow them to hotline the credentialing process, and establish a pipeline into job opportunities.

The bill would give a boost to domestic ship recycling facilities by easing some of the limitations upon the importation of PCBs found in ships going for scrap and removing Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) rules for such imports.

Lastly, the Commerce Committee legislation includes the “Maritime Security and Fisheries Enforcement Act” or “Maritime SAFE Act” which would establish a framework to crack down upon illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, particularly off the shores of developing nations lacking the enforcement resources to contend with large factory trawlers draining their fisheries.

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