



Congress Proposes Replacing Reserve Fleet with Foreign-Built Vessels

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The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2018 (H.R. 2810), reported favorably by the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee on June 28, 2017, would amend existing law to permit the acquisition of foreign-built vessels for the U.S. fleet of military reserve vessels.

The portion of that reserve fleet most likely to be relied upon by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) in a national emergency consists of the 46 vessels of the Ready Reserve Force (RRF) operated by the U.S. Maritime Administration and the 14 sealift surge vessels operated by the Military Sealift Command. The RRF vessels average over 40 years of age. Of the 46 RRF vessels, 35 are roll-on/roll-off vessels.

Current law at 10 U.S.C. § 2218 limits the use of National Defense Sealift Fund moneys to the construction, alteration or conversion of such RRF and other reserve vessels in U.S. shipyards. The NDAA for FY 2018 as introduced amends 10 U.S.C. § 2218.

Specifically, section 1001 of the NDAA authorizes DoD to purchase foreign-built vessels with a preference for foreign-built vessels that have participated in the U.S. Maritime Security Program. Section 1001 further provides that the MSP-vessel preference depends on whether such vessels are “available at a reasonable cost, as determined by the Secretary of Defense.” There are currently about ten roll-on/roll-off vessels enrolled in the Maritime Security Program roughly 20 years of age.

In Congressional hearings in 2016, Gen. Darren W. McDew, the Commander of the U.S. Transportation Command, stated that “[d]ue to the age of vessel’s in MARAD’s Ready Reserve Force, this fleet will begin to lose capacity in the mid to late-2020s, with significant losses in the 2030s. Replacing vessels to sustain this capacity would likely require a multi-billion effort.”

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