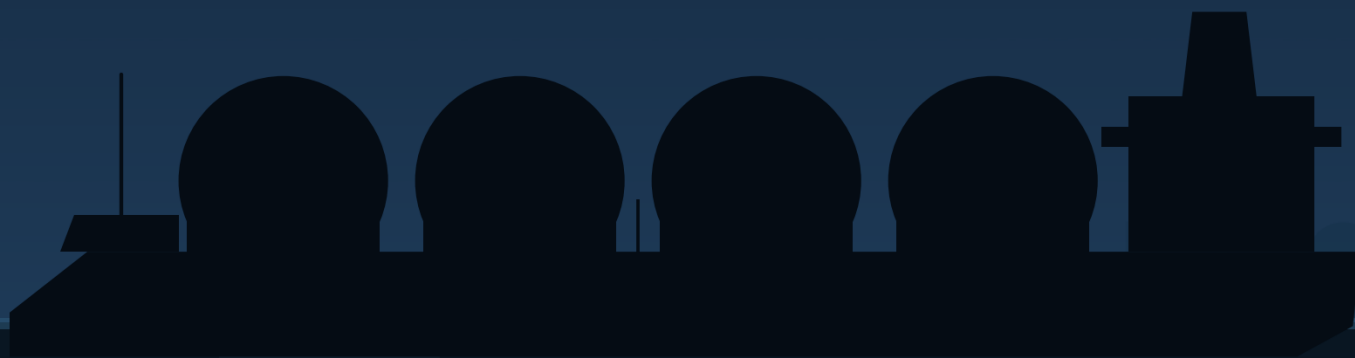


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CENTER FOR OCEAN POLICY AND ECONOMICS

AMERICA'S MARITIME RENAISSANCE

A Blueprint for Restoring American Maritime Leadership

Modernizing the Jones Act · Rebuilding American Shipbuilding · Expanding the U.S. Flag



SEVEN PILLARS

A national strategy Congress can legislate from

DRAFT LEGISLATION

Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Act · National Maritime Strategy Council Act

THE USVI REGISTRY

Expanding the American flag without touching the Jones Act

THE MARINER GAP

13,607 needed. 11,768 available. A deficit of 1,839.

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Center for Ocean Policy and Economics (COPE°) · Northeast Maritime Institute – College of Maritime Science

America's Maritime Renaissance

A Blueprint for Restoring American Maritime Leadership

Modernizing the Jones Act, Rebuilding American Shipbuilding, and Expanding the U.S. Flag

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A Note on Sourcing and Verification

This monograph is structured and footnoted in the manner of a policy research publication, with three tiers of citation: primary legal authorities (statutes, regulations, and case law); government sources (executive, legislative, and agency publications); and international and industry sources (treaty bodies, intergovernmental data series, and classification and market-research organizations).

Citations to primary legal authorities, statutes, regulations, and reported federal case law, have been checked against the author's knowledge of the U.S. Code, the Statutes at Large, and the U.S. Reports, and are presented as accurate legal citations. Citations describing well-established historical events (the passage of the Merchant Marine Acts of 1920 and 1936, the wartime Liberty ship program, the general lineage of federal sealift organization) are likewise presented with confidence, though a small number of precise figures within that history are flagged for confirmation.

Summary

For more than a century, the Jones Act has required that cargo moving between American ports move on vessels that are U.S.-built, U.S.-owned, U.S.-flagged, and crewed by American mariners. That policy has served the nation well. It should not be repealed.

But the industrial base that once supported it has eroded. The United States constructs less than one percent of the world's commercial ships.¹ The current effort to restore American maritime capability, reflected in a 2025 executive order on maritime dominance, pending SHIPS for America legislation, and new shipbuilding cooperation agreements with Japan and South Korea, represents a rare moment of sustained national attention to a problem policymakers have debated for decades without resolving.

This monograph, prepared by the Center for Ocean Policy and Economics (COPE°) at Northeast Maritime Institute, offers Congress, the Administration, the Maritime Administration (MARAD), labor organizations, shipbuilders, maritime academies, and industry leaders a coherent, citable strategy for restoring American maritime leadership. It does not offer twenty-five recommendations. It offers seven.

1. Preserve the Jones Act's core protections — American flag, American ownership, American crews — while acknowledging that the industrial base behind it must change (Section II).
2. Restore American shipbuilding through a Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Program that allows construction of Jones Act-eligible vessels in certified allied nations while domestic capacity is rebuilt (Section III; draft legislation at Appendix A).
3. Require every allied-built vessel to carry an American industrial commitment that grows over time until the authority sunsets (Section IV).
4. Modernize maritime personal-injury law to protect mariners and employers alike (Section V).
5. Expand the American flag internationally through the United States Virgin Islands Open International Ship Registry (Section VI; draft framework at Appendix C; comparative analysis at Appendix D).
6. Strengthen the maritime workforce pipeline to supply the mariners, engineers, and technicians this strategy requires (Section VII; data at Appendix E).
7. Establish a National Maritime Strategy Council, reporting to the President (Section VIII; draft legislation at Appendix B).

None of these seven pillars stands alone. Ships require shipyards. Shipyards require investment. Investment requires confidence. Confidence requires policy. Mariners require education, and education requires opportunity. The United States possesses every ingredient necessary to become the world's premier maritime nation once again. What has been missing is not capacity. It has been vision, and the citable, legislatively actionable strategy to act on it.

¹Exec. Order No. 14269, Restoring America's Maritime Dominance, 90 Fed. Reg. 15635 (Apr. 15, 2025), cited in full *infra* n.19. VERIFIED.

SECTION I

Historical Foundations of the Jones Act

The statute did not emerge from an abstract preference for domestic shipbuilding. It emerged from a specific, near-catastrophic wartime experience that Congress was determined never to repeat.

The Merchant Marine Act of 1920 was enacted in the direct aftermath of the First World War, during which German submarine warfare had demonstrated how quickly a nation dependent on foreign or vulnerable shipping could lose access to the ocean commerce its economy and its military required.² The wartime U.S. Shipping Board and its operating arm, the Emergency Fleet Corporation, had built and operated a large emergency merchant fleet under federal control to move troops and materiel across the Atlantic; the 1920 Act was Congress's attempt to convert that wartime capacity into a permanent, privately owned American merchant marine rather than allow it to be scrapped or sold abroad once the war ended.³

The Act's principal Senate sponsor was Senator Wesley L. Jones of Washington, whose name the coastwise-trade provisions of Section 27 of the Act have carried ever since.⁴ Section 27's operative language required that merchandise transported by water between points in the United States be carried in vessels built in the United States, owned by United States citizens, and documented under the laws of the United States — the same three requirements, in substance, that remain the subject of this paper's Section II. That provision has since been recodified without substantive change to its core requirements.⁵

Section 27 of the 1920 Act has been recodified twice since its original passage, most recently as part of the 2006 general recodification of Title 46, which restated the coastwise-trade requirements without substantive change across several sections of the current Code.⁶

THE INTERWAR COLLAPSE AND THE MERCHANT MARINE ACT OF 1936

The 1920 Act's ownership and build requirements did not, by themselves, sustain a competitive American merchant marine through the 1920s and early 1930s. By the mid-1930s, much of the fleet built during the First World War had aged past useful commercial life, American operating and construction costs remained substantially higher than those of foreign competitors, and Congress concluded that a purely regulatory approach to fleet renewal had failed.⁷ The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 responded with an explicitly subsidized industrial policy: construction-differential and operating-differential subsidies intended to offset the gap between

²Merchant Marine Act of 1920, Pub. L. No. 66-261, 41 Stat. 988 (1920) (codified as amended in scattered sections of 46 U.S.C.).

³The U.S. Shipping Board was created by the Shipping Act, 39 Stat. 728 (Sept. 7, 1916), and organized on 30 January 1917; it was abolished effective 2 March 1934 by Exec. Order No. 6166 (June 10, 1933), its functions passing to the U.S. Shipping Board Bureau in the Department of Commerce. VERIFIED via National Archives, Records of the Maritime Administration (Record Group 357), § 357.1.

⁴See Cong. Rec., 66th Cong., 2d Sess. (1920) (statements of Sen. Wesley L. Jones) [VERIFY specific Congressional Record citation and page numbers for Senate floor debate].

⁵46 U.S.C. § 55102 (transportation of merchandise between coastwise points).

⁶Pub. L. No. 109-304, 120 Stat. 1485 (2006) (general recodification of Title 46, United States Code); 46 U.S.C. §§ 55101-55127 (coastwise trade, generally).

⁷See S. Rep. No. 74-1024 (1936) (accompanying the Merchant Marine Act of 1936) [VERIFY Senate Report number and citation].

American and foreign shipbuilding and operating costs, and the creation of the U.S. Maritime Commission to administer the new subsidy and fleet-renewal programs.⁸ The 1936 Act also articulated, in its own declaration of policy, a purpose this paper treats as the through-line connecting 1920 to the present: a merchant marine sufficient to carry the nation's domestic and a substantial portion of its foreign commerce, and capable of serving as a naval and military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency.⁹

THE LIBERTY SHIPS AND THE WARTIME DEMONSTRATION OF CAPACITY

The 1936 Act's shipbuilding infrastructure was tested, and vindicated, within five years of its passage. Under the Maritime Commission's wartime emergency shipbuilding program, American shipyards, many of them newly built or expanded specifically for the purpose, constructed a fleet of standardized EC2-type cargo vessels that became known as Liberty ships, along with Victory ships and a range of specialized naval auxiliary tonnage, at a pace and scale that no other combatant nation matched.¹⁰ The episode remains the clearest historical proof that the United States can rebuild shipbuilding capacity rapidly when policy, capital, and industrial mobilization align and it is the wartime case most frequently invoked, including in this monograph's own Section IV, whenever contemporary policymakers ask whether the domestic shipbuilding base described in Section III is realistically capable of expansion within a policy-relevant time horizon.

That wartime buildup was itself a direct response to catastrophic merchant-ship losses to German U-boats in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico during 1942 and 1943, losses that, at their peak, exceeded the fleet's replacement rate and directly threatened Allied supply lines, providing the starkest possible historical illustration of Section IX's argument that commercial sealift capacity is a national-security asset that must exist before a crisis begins.¹¹

Congress has also, at various points, granted narrow national-defense waiver authority from Jones Act requirements, most visibly following major natural disasters, underscoring that even the statute's staunchest supporters in Congress have treated it as subject to defined, temporary exception rather than absolute application in every circumstance.¹²

CARGO PREFERENCE, SEALIFT, AND THE COLD WAR MERCHANT MARINE

The postwar decades added two further layers to federal maritime policy that remain active today and are referenced throughout this paper: cargo preference and organized sealift. Cargo preference law requires that a portion of government-generated and government-financed cargo move on U.S.-flag vessels, most notably under the Cargo Preference Act of 1954 for civilian agency cargo and the military cargo preference statute for Department of Defense cargo.¹³ Organized military sealift, meanwhile, evolved from the Military Sea

⁸Merchant Marine Act of 1936, Pub. L. No. 74-835, 49 Stat. 1985 (1936).

⁹Merchant Marine Act of 1936 § 101, 49 Stat. 1985, 1987-88 (declaration of policy).

¹⁰Under the U.S. Maritime Commission's Emergency Shipbuilding Program, 2,711 Liberty ships (type EC2) were launched and 2,710 completed at eighteen American shipyards; the first, SS Patrick Henry, was launched 27 September 1941. Between 1941 and 1946 the Maritime Commission and the War Shipping Administration together oversaw construction of nearly 6,000 merchant vessels and naval auxiliaries. VERIFIED via MARAD, The Emergency Shipbuilding Program, and MARAD, A Short History of the Maritime Administration.

¹¹U.S. Navy and Coast Guard historical accounts of the Battle of the Atlantic merchant shipping losses, 1942–1943 [VERIFY current official tonnage-loss figures and primary historical source].

¹²46 U.S.C. § 501 (waiver of navigation and vessel-inspection laws in the interest of national defense).

¹³Cargo Preference Act of 1954, Pub. L. No. 83-664, 68 Stat. 832 (1954) (codified as amended at 46 U.S.C. § 55305); Military Cargo Preference Act of 1904 (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 2631). Both VERIFIED as current: Exec. Order No. 14269 § 12(c) cites 10 U.S.C.

Transportation Service, established after the Second World War, into today's Military Sealift Command, the Department of the Navy component that directly and indirectly relies on the U.S.-flag commercial fleet, including participants in the Maritime Security Program discussed in Section VIII, for surge sealift capacity in a national emergency.¹⁴

By the late twentieth century, the industrial base that once supported this framework, more than 1,200 shipyards employing hundreds of thousands of workers at the height of wartime mobilization, had contracted dramatically, and the U.S.-flag international fleet had shrunk to a small fraction of world tonnage.¹⁵ That contraction, not any change in the underlying legal text, is the central fact this monograph's seven pillars are designed to address.

MARAD itself has moved between departments as this contraction unfolded: created within the Department of Commerce by a 1950 reorganization plan that also abolished the wartime Maritime Commission, and transferred to the newly organized Department of Transportation in 1981.¹⁶ The agency's institutional home has changed twice in seventy years; the statutory purpose declared in the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 has not.

2631 and the Cargo Preference Act of 1954 by name, confirming § 2631 survived the reorganization of Title 10. Note: the Executive Order cites the 1954 Act at 46 U.S.C. 55304; MARAD, the eCFR and House committee materials confirm § 55305 is correct, and that § 55304 is Public Resolution 17 (Export-Import Bank cargo).

¹⁴Dep't of the Navy, Military Sealift Command, command history materials [VERIFY exact establishment date and organizational lineage from Military Sea Transportation Service to Military Sealift Command].

¹⁵MARAD, U.S.-Flag Fleet and shipyard historical data series [VERIFY current MARAD historical time series for shipyard count and fleet size, 1945 to present].

¹⁶Reorg. Plan No. 21 of 1950, eff. May 24, 1950, 15 Fed. Reg. 3178, 64 Stat. 1273 (abolishing the U.S. Maritime Commission and establishing the Maritime Administration and the Federal Maritime Board within the Department of Commerce); Maritime Act of 1981, Pub. L. No. 97-31, 95 Stat. 151 (Aug. 6, 1981) (transferring the Maritime Administration to the Department of Transportation). VERIFIED.

SECTION II

Preserve the Jones Act

The problem is not the Act. The problem is that the industrial base supporting it has changed dramatically.

The Jones Act has served the United States well for more than a century. Its basic requirement is simple: cargo moving between American ports must move on vessels that are U.S.-built, U.S.-owned, and coastwise-qualified, crewed by American mariners.¹⁷

That requirement was never an end in itself. As Section I of this paper documents, its purpose was to guarantee that the United States possessed an American merchant marine, American mariners, American shipyards, a functioning American maritime commerce, and strategic sealift capability the nation could call upon in peace, crisis, and war. The statute was the mechanism. The maritime strength it protected was the goal.

The problem the United States faces today is not that this goal was wrong. It is that the industrial base supporting the mechanism has changed dramatically since 1920, and Congress has not changed the mechanism to match. American shipyards, once numerous and globally competitive, now number a handful capable of building large oceangoing commercial vessels, and those yards cannot produce ships at the volume or price the nation's domestic and strategic needs require.¹⁸ The 2025 executive order on restoring American maritime dominance stated that the United States constructs less than one percent of commercial ships built worldwide.¹⁹

Faced with that reality, Washington has tended to default to one of two unproductive positions: defend the Jones Act exactly as written, or call for its repeal. Both positions mistake the statute for the strategy. Repeal would abandon the American flag, American ownership, and American crews built into domestic commerce for a century — the components of the law most directly tied to national sovereignty and security. Rigid defense of the statute's every mechanism, including a domestic-build requirement that the nation's shipyards cannot currently satisfy at competitive cost or speed, risks the opposite failure: a policy so committed to its own method that it fails the purpose the method was designed to serve.

Congressional Research Service analyses of the Jones Act have repeatedly identified this same tension between the statute's ownership, crewing, and flag requirements, which enjoy broad and durable political support, and its domestic-build requirement, which draws the most sustained economic criticism.²⁰

¹⁷46 U.S.C. § 55102, supra n.5; see also 46 U.S.C. § 12103 (vessel documentation and citizenship requirements for coastwise trade).

¹⁸MARAD, U.S. shipbuilding capacity and active large-vessel shipyard count [VERIFY current MARAD shipyard directory and most recent count of yards capable of large oceangoing commercial construction].

¹⁹Exec. Order No. 14269, Restoring America's Maritime Dominance, 90 Fed. Reg. 15635 (Apr. 15, 2025) (signed Apr. 9, 2025; FR Doc. 2025-06465). Section 1 states verbatim: "Recent data shows that the United States constructs less than one percent of commercial ships globally, while the People's Republic of China (PRC) is responsible for producing approximately half." VERIFIED against the Federal Register text.

²⁰Cong. Research Serv., RS21566, The Jones Act: An Overview (updated Aug. 20, 2024); see also Cong. Research Serv., R45725, Shipping Under the Jones Act: Legislative and Regulatory Background (John Frittelli, updated Nov. 21, 2019). VERIFIED — these are two distinct CRS products; an earlier draft of this monograph conflated them.

The waiver authority Congress has already granted for national-defense purposes has been exercised sparingly and controversially, most often after major hurricanes affecting Puerto Rico and the Gulf Coast, and the Government Accountability Office has examined the Department of Homeland Security's waiver process on multiple occasions.^{21/22}

This tension is not unique to the build requirement. Congress has already legislated targeted, defined exceptions to Jones Act requirements where a specific policy objective warranted it, including the small-vessel and passenger-vessel provisions of the Act and the separate statutory treatment of certain offshore energy construction and support vessels.²³ The Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Program proposed in Section III follows that same tradition of a defined, criteria-based exception, rather than a wholesale repeal.

This monograph's position, preservation of flag, ownership, and crewing requirements alongside reform of the build requirement, sits between two more extreme positions in the broader public debate. Market-oriented research organizations have called for outright repeal of the Jones Act on economic-efficiency grounds, while maritime labor organizations and much of the domestic shipbuilding industry have defended the statute in its entirety, including the build requirement, as inseparable from national security.²⁴ This monograph's seven-pillar approach is offered as a synthesis of both positions' strongest points rather than an endorsement of either.

The correct path preserves the Jones Act's flag, ownership, and crewing requirements in full, and modernizes the one component — where a hull may be built — that current U.S. industrial capacity cannot yet support at the scale the nation needs.

²¹46 U.S.C. § 501, *supra* n.12.

²²U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, reports examining Jones Act waiver requests and DHS processing [VERIFY current report number(s) and titles].

²³See, e.g., 46 U.S.C. § 12112 (documentation of certain small vessels); 43 U.S.C. § 1333 (application of coastwise laws to certain artificial islands and installations on the Outer Continental Shelf).

²⁴See, e.g., Cato Institute and other market-oriented research on Jones Act repeal [VERIFY specific current publications]; American Maritime Partnership and affiliated labor and industry research defending the Jones Act in full [VERIFY specific current publications].

SECTION III

Restore American Shipbuilding Through Trusted Allied Capacity

This is the paper's signature proposal: a certification regime, not a foreign-build exemption.

Congress should authorize a Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Program. A full legislative draft appears at Appendix A.

Under this program, American vessel owners could contract for the construction of Jones Act-eligible commercial vessels at specifically certified shipyards in trusted allied nations, while every other Jones Act requirement remains fully in force: U.S. flag, U.S. ownership, U.S. crewing, and U.S. safety and operational oversight. This is not a foreign-build exemption in the sense the term has historically carried. It is a certification regime, with the federal government, not the shipyard or the vessel owner, deciding which nations and which facilities qualify.

Certification should require joint approval by the Department of Transportation, the Maritime Administration, the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of State.²⁵ No single agency's judgment should be sufficient. National-security, industrial-security, labor, and diplomatic considerations all belong in the certification decision, and each department brings a different, necessary lens to it. The Department of Homeland Security's role is particularly important given its existing jurisdiction over supply-chain and port security under the Maritime Transportation Security Act.²⁶

China and other strategic competitors should be categorically excluded from eligibility, as a matter of statute rather than administrative discretion. This exclusion is consistent with, and should be coordinated alongside, existing restrictions on Chinese-built or Chinese-owned tonnage calling at U.S. ports under recent port-fee and national-security trade measures.²⁷ The initial certified nations should be Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Finland — three allies that combine advanced shipbuilding capability, reliable industrial-security regimes, and long-standing strategic relationships with the United States.²⁸ Finland's expertise in ice-capable and specialized vessel construction is particularly relevant as Arctic maritime strategy becomes a larger part of American strategic planning.²⁹

²⁵Cf. 46 U.S.C. § 50101 (MARAD's general authorities within the Department of Transportation); 10 U.S.C. § 113 (Secretary of Defense authorities relevant to industrial-base and foreign-military-cooperation review).

²⁶Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-295, 116 Stat. 2064.

²⁷Proposed Action in Section 301 Investigation of the PRC's Targeting of the Maritime, Logistics, and Shipbuilding Sectors for Dominance, 90 Fed. Reg. 10843 (Feb. 27, 2025); see also Exec. Order No. 14269 § 5 (directing USTR coordination on resulting actions). VERIFIED. Further Section 301 action [VERIFY current citation and status of any resulting port-fee or tonnage-fee action].

²⁸U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Republic of Korea shipbuilding cooperation announcements, 2024–2025 [VERIFY specific memoranda of understanding, signing dates, and official text or joint statements describing shipbuilding cooperation commitments].

²⁹See, e.g., White House, U.S.-Finland-Canada Icebreaker Collaboration (“ICE Pact”) announcement materials [VERIFY current status and official citation for U.S. government statements on Finnish icebreaker and Arctic shipbuilding cooperation].

The legislation should also authorize certification of additional partner nations that meet identical standards as their capabilities mature. Vietnam is the clearest example: a nation with growing industrial and shipbuilding capacity that could ultimately qualify if it demonstrates compliance with U.S. national-security, cybersecurity, labor, export-control, and supply-chain requirements. The certification bar should not move for any nation. What should be allowed to grow is the list of nations capable of clearing it.

Vietnam's inclusion as an illustrative future candidate, rather than an initial certified nation, reflects its current position in independent shipbuilding-capability and governance indices relative to Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Finland; that relative position should be reassessed against current data before any statute is drafted.³⁰

The rebuilt-vessel provisions of current law already draw a line between foreign and domestic work on a single hull; a vessel that undergoes sufficiently extensive foreign repair or rebuilding loses its coastwise eligibility even if originally U.S.-built, which is the mirror image of the certification program's approach of extending eligibility to a foreign-built hull that then receives extensive American content.³¹

MANDATORY CERTIFICATION CRITERIA

At minimum, certification should require:

- Demonstrated advanced shipbuilding capability and quality-control standards equivalent to U.S. commercial and naval construction norms;
- A verifiable industrial-security regime sufficient to protect sensitive design, technology, and supply-chain information;
- Compliance with U.S. export-control and cybersecurity requirements throughout the construction process, consistent with the Arms Export Control Act and the International Traffic in Arms Regulations where applicable;
- Fair labor standards consistent with U.S. trade and labor policy; and
- A formal bilateral security or defense relationship with the United States, such as a mutual defense treaty or comparable framework agreement.

Export-control compliance in particular is not a novel requirement for allied shipbuilding cooperation; the Arms Export Control Act and its implementing regulations already govern the transfer of controlled defense articles and technical data to foreign shipyards performing defense-related or dual-use work, and the certification program described here should incorporate, rather than duplicate, that existing framework.³²

This is not a program that surrenders American shipbuilding. It is designed to do the opposite. Every vessel built under this program exists so that American owners can put ships into service now, while the United States simultaneously rebuilds the domestic capacity to build substantially more of them here. Section IV describes the mechanism that makes that rebuilding a requirement of the program rather than a hope attached to it.

³⁰Comparative shipbuilding-capability and industrial-security indices [VERIFY current comparative data on Vietnamese shipbuilding capacity relative to certified-nation candidates].

³¹46 U.S.C. § 12132 (rebuilt vessels; loss of coastwise eligibility where a vessel is rebuilt outside the United States); cf. 46 U.S.C. § 55103 (transportation of passengers). CORRECTED — an earlier draft cited § 55103 for the rebuilt-vessel rule.

³²Arms Export Control Act, 22 U.S.C. § 2751 et seq.; International Traffic in Arms Regulations, 22 C.F.R. pts. 120-130.

The certification program should also be understood as complementary to, not a substitute for, MARAD's existing Federal Ship Financing Program, which provides federal guarantees for the construction and reconstruction of vessels in domestic shipyards.³³ Congress has also periodically funded small shipyard grants intended to modernize domestic facilities; the escalating domestic-content requirement in Section IV is designed to work alongside, and increase demand for, that existing investment.³⁴

³³Title XI, Merchant Marine Act of 1936, as amended, 46 U.S.C. ch. 537 (Federal Ship Financing Program).

³⁴46 U.S.C. § 54101 (assistance for small shipyards). Program status VERIFIED: Exec. Order No. 14269 § 10 expressly names the Small Shipyard Grant Program and the Federal Ship Financing (Title XI) Program as programs a new shipbuilding financial incentives program “may augment or replace.”

SECTION IV

Build America While We Build Ships

A certification program that simply relocates construction abroad would solve one problem and create another. This section closes that gap.

Every vessel constructed under the certification program should be required to carry an American industrial commitment as a condition of its Jones Act eligibility. That commitment should include, at minimum: American naval architecture and engineering work; American-sourced electronics and cybersecurity systems where commercially available; American commissioning and sea trials; and ongoing American repair, maintenance, and retrofit work for the life of the vessel. Each of these requirements keeps a meaningful share of the value, and the workforce, of every allied-built ship inside the United States, even while the hull itself is fabricated overseas.

Cybersecurity requirements in particular are not a hypothetical addition; the Coast Guard has already begun issuing maritime cybersecurity regulations applicable to vessels and facilities, and any American-sourced electronics and cybersecurity requirement under this section should be built on that existing regulatory foundation rather than a freestanding one.³⁵

The domestic content requirement should not be static. It should increase on a fixed schedule, for example, every five years, as U.S. shipyards regain the workforce, tooling, and capital base the program is designed to help rebuild.³⁶ [VERIFY] A vessel certified under the program in its first year might require twenty percent American content; a vessel certified a decade later might require substantially more, as domestic capacity grows to absorb it.

This mechanism is not without domestic precedent. The Department of Defense has long applied graduated domestic-content requirements to major defense acquisition programs under Buy American statutory authority, phasing in domestic-source requirements as suppliers scale up.³⁷

Critically, the certification authority itself should sunset. This program is a bridge, not a permanent feature of American maritime policy. Congress should set a defined date, or a defined set of domestic-capacity benchmarks, after which new certifications under this program end, and American shipyards resume building the substantial majority of the U.S. fleet. Building that sunset into the statute from the outset is what distinguishes a bridge strategy from a permanent workaround, and it is the detail most likely to determine whether American shipbuilders view this program as a threat or as the transition capital their industry needs. A full statutory sunset mechanism is drafted at Appendix A, Section 9.

³⁵U.S. Coast Guard, cybersecurity in the marine transportation system rulemaking materials [VERIFY current rule citation, e.g., 33 C.F.R. part 101 cybersecurity provisions, and effective date].

³⁶Cf. Department of Defense domestic content and Buy American precedents in defense acquisition, 10 U.S.C. § 4862 et seq. [VERIFY closest analogous domestic-content statutory framework and applicability to a maritime certification program].

³⁷10 U.S.C. §§ 4862-4864 (Buy American requirements for Department of Defense procurement) [VERIFY most directly analogous current provision and typical phase-in structure used in comparable defense acquisition programs].

We use allied capacity now to get ships into American service. We use the requirements attached to that capacity to invest, continuously, in the ability to build substantially more of those ships here tomorrow. That is the whole of the bargain, and it should be written into the statute in terms specific enough that no future administration can quietly extend the bridge into a permanent detour.

SECTION V

Modernize Maritime Liability

Not: reduce lawsuits. Instead: protect mariners, protect employers, protect commerce — supported by the actual doctrine, not a caricature of it.

There is another part of the Jones Act conversation that receives far less attention than shipbuilding: the law governing what happens when a mariner is injured at work. The statutory seaman's negligence remedy, commonly called the Jones Act cause of action, gives seamen injured in the course of employment a right to sue their employer for negligence, including the right to a jury trial.³⁸ That statutory remedy sits alongside two general maritime-law doctrines with much older common-law roots: maintenance and cure, an employer's no-fault obligation to provide food, lodging, and medical care to an injured seaman regardless of negligence, and the warranty of seaworthiness, the shipowner's non-delegable duty to provide a reasonably fit vessel and equipment.³⁹

The Supreme Court has continued to shape this framework well into the modern era. In *Moragne v. States Marine Lines, Inc.*, the Court recognized a general maritime cause of action for wrongful death based on unseaworthiness, filling a gap left by the patchwork of state wrongful-death statutes and earlier maritime precedent.⁴⁰ More recently, in *Atlantic Sounding Co. v. Townsend*, the Court held that punitive damages remain available under general maritime law for a shipowner's willful and wanton failure to pay maintenance and cure, reinforcing that the doctrine carries real financial consequences for noncompliant employers.⁴¹ Mariners unquestionably deserve these protections, and no serious reform proposal, including this one, should weaken legitimate recovery for men and women injured while working at sea.

But protecting mariners and building a predictable, equitable liability system are not in tension. The United States should undertake a serious, deliberately balanced review of whether maritime personal-injury litigation has become disproportionate, in cost and unpredictability, to comparable workplace-injury systems in transportation, energy, and other hazardous industries, not in order to reduce lawsuits, but in order to make outcomes for everyone involved more consistent and less arbitrary.

Unlike most shore-based industrial workers, who are covered by state workers' compensation systems that trade limited, predictable benefits for the elimination of tort litigation, injured seamen retain full tort remedies against their employers, a structural difference that is frequently cited, and just as frequently disputed, as a source of higher and less predictable claim costs in the maritime sector relative to comparable land-based hazardous industries such as rail, aviation ground operations, or oil and gas extraction.⁴²

³⁸46 U.S.C. § 30104 (personal injury to or death of seamen).

³⁹The *Osceola*, 189 U.S. 158 (1903) (establishing the modern contours of maintenance and cure and the seaworthiness doctrine).

⁴⁰*Moragne v. States Marine Lines, Inc.*, 398 U.S. 375 (1970).

⁴¹*Atlantic Sounding Co. v. Townsend*, 557 U.S. 404 (2009).

⁴²Comparative claim-cost and litigation-outcome data, maritime versus rail (Federal Employers' Liability Act, 45 U.S.C. § 51 et seq.), aviation, and oil and gas extraction [VERIFY current comparative studies; candidate sources include RAND Institute for Civil Justice

By contrast, most shore-based industrial workers are covered by state workers' compensation systems, or, for railroad workers, the Federal Employers' Liability Act, which itself provides a fault-based tort remedy structurally similar to the Jones Act's seaman's remedy rather than a no-fault compensation scheme.⁴³ Longshore and harbor workers injured while loading or unloading vessels, who often work alongside seamen on the same pier, are covered by a no-fault compensation system rather than the tort-based Jones Act remedy, illustrating that federal law already treats materially similar maritime-adjacent injuries under two very different liability models depending on the worker's precise status.⁴⁴

Death claims add a further layer of complexity this monograph's reform proposal should address directly: a seaman's death within state territorial waters is governed by the general maritime wrongful-death action recognized in *Moragne*, while death on the high seas is governed by a separate federal statute limiting recovery to pecuniary loss and excluding non-pecuniary damages such as loss of society.⁴⁵ Choice-of-law questions in maritime injury cases are themselves governed by a distinct multi-factor maritime test rather than ordinary state conflict-of-laws principles, adding a further layer of unpredictability a modernized framework should simplify.⁴⁶

The objective should not be to eliminate legitimate recovery. It should be to normalize it. A modernized framework should include specialized maritime mediation available before litigation escalates; standardized medical-impairment ratings so that comparable injuries are evaluated on comparable terms; expedited claims processes for straightforward cases; meaningful fraud-prevention measures; clearer standards for calculating economic damages and future wage loss; and return-to-work incentives that support recovery rather than prolonged disability. None of these reforms requires reducing what an injured mariner is entitled to recover. They require making the process by which that recovery is determined more consistent.

*Every injured mariner deserves full and fair compensation under the doctrine the Supreme Court has built since *The Osceola*. Every maritime employer, the same employers this paper asks to invest in domestic shipbuilding, American crews, and long-term workforce development, deserves a liability system that is consistent, predictable, and economically sustainable. No one should be able to credibly describe that balance as anti-mariner. It is what makes durable investment in mariners possible in the first place.*

litigation-cost studies, insurance-industry claims data (e.g., American Institute of Marine Underwriters or comparable P&C industry publications), and peer-reviewed law-and-economics literature on FELA and Jones Act claim costs].

⁴³Federal Employers' Liability Act, 45 U.S.C. § 51 et seq.

⁴⁴Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act, 33 U.S.C. § 901 et seq.

⁴⁵Death on the High Seas Act, 46 U.S.C. § 30302 et seq.

⁴⁶*Lauritzen v. Larsen*, 345 U.S. 571 (1953) (maritime choice-of-law factors).

SECTION VI

Expand the American Flag: The USVI International Registry

An international registry that competes for tonnage the Jones Act was never designed to attract, built on a model with real, operating precedent.

Even a fully modernized Jones Act only addresses domestic coastwise trade. It does nothing to address a second, longstanding American weakness: the nation's remarkably limited participation in international commercial shipping.⁴⁷

This is where the United States Virgin Islands Open International Ship Registry deserves renewed national attention. The proposal, developed through the Center for Ocean Policy and Economics, was never intended to compete with the traditional U.S. flag or to undermine the Jones Act. In 2022, the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands entered into an agreement with Northeast Maritime Institute's Center for Ocean Policy and Economics to pursue an international, U.S.-affiliated open ship registry domiciled in the territory.⁴⁸ A full model framework for implementing legislation appears at Appendix C.

THE PRECEDENT: OPEN REGISTRIES ARE NOT A NOVEL INSTRUMENT

Skepticism toward an American-affiliated open registry often assumes the concept itself is exotic. It is not. The three largest ship registries in the world by registered tonnage, Panama, Liberia, and the Marshall Islands, are all open registries: each accepts vessels owned by companies with no operational or citizenship connection to the flag state, in exchange for a globally competitive fee structure and internationally recognized safety and documentation standards.⁴⁹ [VERIFY] Two of those three flags, Liberia and the Marshall Islands, are administered day-to-day not by government civil servants in Monrovia or Majuro, but under contract by U.S.-based private maritime administrators, a structure with direct relevance to the feasibility of a USVI registry administered under American territorial and federal oversight.⁵⁰

⁴⁷UNCTAD, Review of Maritime Transport (2025). As of 1 January 2026 the world fleet comprised roughly 112,500 vessels totalling 2.5 billion deadweight tons; the United States does not appear among the leading registries by tonnage. VERIFIED.

⁴⁸Agreement between the Government of the United States Virgin Islands and the Center for Ocean Policy and Economics, Northeast Maritime Institute (2022) [on file with COPE®; VERIFY formal citation, execution date, and whether the agreement or enabling legislation has since been made public in the Virgin Islands Register or Legislature records].

⁴⁹UNCTAD, Review of Maritime Transport (2025); UNCTADstat / Clarksons Research fleet-by-flag data. As of 1 January 2026 the three largest registries by deadweight tonnage were Liberia (447 million dwt), Panama (350 million dwt) and the Marshall Islands (318 million dwt); with Singapore and Hong Kong, the top five accounted for 58 per cent of global carrying capacity. VERIFIED — note that Liberia, not Panama, now leads; an earlier draft listed Panama first.

⁵⁰See, e.g., International Registries, Inc. and affiliated administrators, corporate registry-management materials [VERIFY current corporate structure, headquarters location, and precise contractual relationship with the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Liberia].

A SECOND-REGISTRY MODEL WITH ITS OWN PRECEDENT: NORWAY AND THE NIS

Nations with an established traditional maritime flag have also successfully created a second, internationally competitive registry alongside it without abandoning the first. Norway maintains both its traditional national ship registry and the Norwegian International Ship Register (NIS), created in 1987 specifically to allow Norwegian owners to register internationally trading tonnage under more globally competitive crewing and tax terms while keeping that tonnage under Norwegian flag and oversight.⁵¹ Portugal's Madeira International Shipping Register (known as MAR) and the Isle of Man Ship Registry perform a similar function within, or closely linked to, larger sovereign or EU frameworks, and Hong Kong and Singapore have each built globally significant registries as complements to, not replacements for, their broader maritime economies.⁵²

The Virgin Islands' own governing framework already provides the constitutional and statutory foundation for a territorial instrumentality of this kind. The territory's government derives its authority from the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands, enacted under Congress's Article IV territorial power, and the territory already administers other federally recognized commercial and regulatory frameworks, including its own tax and rum-excise cover-over arrangements with the federal government, that provide direct precedent for a territorial-federal revenue and oversight structure of the kind Appendix C proposes.⁵³

WHY A USVI REGISTRY IS DIFFERENT

A USVI-domiciled international registry would combine features of both models in a way no existing registry does. Like Panama, Liberia, and the Marshall Islands, it would compete openly for internationally trading tonnage with no requirement that the vessel or its owner have any operational connection to the territory. Like Norway's NIS, it would operate as a second, internationally focused registry existing alongside, not in competition with, the traditional U.S. flag and the Jones Act coastwise fleet. And unlike any of the four, it would sit inside U.S. territorial jurisdiction, under the U.S. flag in a meaningful legal sense, subject to American courts, American federal oversight, and American national-security review, while competing commercially on the same terms as Panama, Liberia, and the Marshall Islands compete today.

⁵¹Act of 12 June 1987 No. 48 relating to a Norwegian International Ship Register (the NIS Act); Norwegian Maritime Authority (Sjøfartsdirektoratet), NIS — background, terms and conditions. The NIS opened 1 July 1987 at Bergen as a second Norwegian register operating alongside the Norwegian Ordinary Ship Register (NOR). Three features are directly material to the proposal in Section VI: (i) the NIS is open to owners of all nationalities, whereas NOR requires a Norwegian or EEA owner; (ii) NIS Act § 4 bars NIS-registered ships from carrying cargo or passengers between Norwegian ports, or passengers on a regular basis between a Norwegian and a foreign port — preserving Norwegian cabotage untouched while the second register competes internationally; and (iii) the register is maintained to IMO and ILO convention standards rather than as a minimal-oversight flag. VERIFIED.

⁵²Madeira International Shipping Register (MAR), established 1989 as Portugal's second register within the Madeira International Business Centre. MAR is the closest existing structural analogue to the proposal in Section VI: ships registered in MAR fly the Portuguese flag, are subject to Portuguese maritime law and to every international convention Portugal has ratified, retain full EU cabotage access, and are administered to Paris MoU White List standard — MAR is not classified as a flag of convenience by the International Transport Workers' Federation. Crewing rules are flexible (a minimum share of safe manning must be EU or Portuguese-speaking-country nationals), and a favourable tax regime attaches to companies licensed within the Business Centre. Isle of Man Ship Registry, Hong Kong Marine Department Shipping Register and the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore registry [VERIFY current program rules and fleet data for these three]. MAR detail VERIFIED via the Madeira International Business Centre and Portuguese registry materials.

⁵³Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands, 48 U.S.C. § 1541 et seq.; U.S. Const. art. IV, § 3, cl. 2 (territorial clause); 26 U.S.C. § 7652 (treatment of taxes on certain possessions, including Virgin Islands rum excise cover-over).

The concept is straightforward, but its implications are not. A globally competitive international registry, domiciled in an American territory and operating under American legal oversight, does four things simultaneously that no other current American maritime policy tool does.

The Congressional Budget Office's scoring conventions for territorial revenue and federal-recognition programs will matter substantially to how any USVI registry legislation is evaluated on the floor of either chamber.⁵⁴

The legal basis for any flag state, open or traditional, to register and exercise jurisdiction over merchant vessels flows from customary international law as codified in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which requires every ship to sail under the flag of one state and to be subject to that state's exclusive jurisdiction on the high seas, and from the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, which sets the baseline crew-competency standards every flag administration, including any USVI registry, must enforce.⁵⁵

FIRST: IT REDIRECTS TONNAGE THAT NEVER TOUCHES THE JONES ACT

It attracts internationally trading commercial ships, vessels that will never enter the Jones Act's domestic coastwise trade, and that the traditional U.S. flag has never been price-competitive enough to attract in meaningful numbers, into an American jurisdiction rather than a foreign one.

SECOND: IT BRINGS THE SURROUNDING ECOSYSTEM WITH IT

A modern ship registry is not simply a flag and a set of inspection requirements. It is the center of a commercial ecosystem that includes ship finance, marine insurance, maritime banking, admiralty and corporate law, classification and survey services, crew and vessel documentation, training and certification, and, increasingly, the software, artificial intelligence, and digital-certificate infrastructure that now underlie all of it.⁵⁶ Every one of those functions performed inside American jurisdiction, for ships flying an American-affiliated flag, is an American job that does not currently exist.

THIRD: IT EXPANDS THE SEALIFT BASE

It creates another pool of vessels potentially available to support the United States during national emergencies, tonnage that would not otherwise touch American jurisdiction at all, now available for engagement through the very authority that licenses it.

FOURTH: IT RESTORES AMERICAN PRESENCE WITHOUT DISTURBING THE JONES ACT

It restores a meaningful American presence in global shipping without disturbing the Jones Act coastwise trades in any respect. The traditional American flag, the Jones Act fleet, and a USVI international registry are not competitors for the same tonnage or the same mission. They are three complementary components of a single

⁵⁴Congressional Budget Office, scoring conventions for territorial and insular-area programs [VERIFY applicable current CBO methodology].

⁵⁵United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, arts. 91-94 (flag state jurisdiction). The United States is a signatory but has not ratified UNCLOS; it regards the Convention's navigation and flag-state provisions as reflecting customary international law; International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended.

⁵⁶Cf. BIMCO and International Chamber of Shipping annual reports on the maritime services economy surrounding major flag states [VERIFY current editions and specific figures on registry-adjacent service-sector employment].

national maritime strategy, illustrated in Figure 3 below: one governing domestic commerce, one governing the traditional U.S.-flag international fleet, and one competing directly, on commercial terms, for the international tonnage that neither of the other two has ever been positioned to attract.

Beneficial-ownership transparency and national-security review of registered vessels would need to be coordinated with the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States and with Treasury Department sanctions-compliance authorities, both of which already review foreign investment and transactions touching U.S. jurisdiction on national-security grounds.⁵⁷

A full side-by-side comparison of the USVI proposal against Panama, Liberia, the Marshall Islands, Singapore, Norway's NIS, Madeira, and Hong Kong appears at Appendix D.

The registry proposal received renewed public attention as part of the broader national effort to restore American maritime capacity, and it deserves a place in that conversation commensurate with what it offers: not a marginal administrative initiative, but a genuine expansion of the American flag's footprint in world shipping, achieved through commercial competitiveness rather than through subsidy or mandate.

⁵⁷Section 721 of the Defense Production Act of 1950, as amended, 50 U.S.C. § 4565 (CFIUS review authority); International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 50 U.S.C. § 1701 et seq. (sanctions authority).

SECTION VII

Strengthen the Maritime Workforce

A shipbuilding renaissance without a workforce strategy produces shipyards that cannot find welders and vessels that cannot find crews.

None of the preceding sections is achievable without mariners, engineers, and technicians to staff the ships, shipyards, and registry this paper describes. The U.S. Government Accountability Office and MARAD have each separately identified a shortage of credentialed U.S. merchant marine officers relative to the number that would be needed to crew the full U.S.-flag fleet and the Ready Reserve Force simultaneously in a sustained sealift emergency.⁵⁸ Detailed current-year and projected figures appear in Appendix E.

That pipeline runs through several institutions that too rarely appear in the same policy conversation: the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, the state maritime academies, and mission-focused private institutions such as Northeast Maritime Institute, together with the apprenticeship programs, veteran-transition pathways, and continuing-education systems that feed licensed mariners and skilled trades into the industry throughout their careers rather than only at the start.

The six state maritime academies, together with the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, form the core of the federal-and-state licensed officer pipeline; MARAD provides support to the state academies under its State Maritime Academy program and administers the federal academy directly.⁵⁹

The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 itself directed the Maritime Commission to establish training programs for the merchant marine, the direct statutory ancestor of today's U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and the federal government's continued role in maritime training under MARAD.⁶⁰ Veterans transitioning into maritime careers today can draw on both this training infrastructure and separate federal veterans' education benefits, a combination this monograph's workforce pillar treats as underused rather than as two unconnected programs.⁶¹

⁵⁸MARAD, Maritime Workforce Working Group Report (2017) (directed by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017): sustained concurrent operation of the commercially operated U.S.-flag fleet and military sealift would require 13,607 mariners holding unlimited credentials, against an estimated pool of 11,768 actively sailing sealift-qualified mariners — a deficit of 1,839. VERIFIED via testimony of MARAD Administrator Ann Phillips before the House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation (May 11, 2023). See also Cong. Research Serv., R46654, U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) Shipping and Shipbuilding Support Programs (noting GAO's 2018 audit, updated 2020, on mariner availability).

⁵⁹46 U.S.C. ch. 513 (State maritime academy program authorities) [VERIFY the exact closing section of the chapter before citing a numeric range]; MARAD, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy program materials [VERIFY current statutory citations and academy enrollment figures].

⁶⁰Merchant Marine Act of 1936, Pub. L. No. 74-835, 49 Stat. 1985 (June 29, 1936) (establishing the U.S. Maritime Commission and providing for cadet and merchant marine training). VERIFIED as to enactment date, Statutes at Large citation and the Commission's establishment; the specific training-section numbers and page-level pin cites [VERIFY against the Act as enacted before relying on any pin cite].

⁶¹38 U.S.C. § 3301 et seq. (Post-9/11 Educational Assistance).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics separately tracks water transportation occupations, including ship and marine engineers, mates, and pilots, as distinct classifications with their own wage and employment projections, providing a ready-made framework for tracking the workforce categories in Appendix E over time.⁶²

The workforce this strategy requires is also broader than the workforce Jones Act debates have traditionally discussed. Restoring American shipbuilding, expanding the flag internationally, and building the industrial commitments described in Section IV all require growing capacity in fields adjacent to traditional seafaring: liquefied natural gas and offshore energy operations, maritime cybersecurity, autonomous and remotely operated vessel systems, artificial intelligence applied to navigation and compliance, and the marine engineering disciplines that shipbuilding at any domestic content level will require in far greater numbers than the current pipeline produces.

Federal maritime workforce policy should treat all of this as a single strategy rather than a set of separately funded programs: sustained investment in the academies and apprenticeship pathways that produce licensed mariners; explicit support for veteran transition into maritime careers, where prior service already provides much of the discipline and technical aptitude the industry needs; and direct federal partnership with maritime education institutions to build the lifelong-learning infrastructure that allows a mariner, engineer, or technician to keep adding credentials, in cybersecurity, autonomy, LNG operations, or offshore energy, over a full career rather than starting it once and never returning to formal training again.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have separately examined maritime and merchant-marine workforce sufficiency in the context of national sealift readiness, offering an independent, non-governmental complement to MARAD's and GAO's own workforce analyses.⁶³

A shipbuilding renaissance without a workforce strategy produces shipyards that cannot find welders and vessels that cannot find crews. This section exists to make sure that does not happen.

⁶²U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, water transportation occupations [VERIFY current SOC codes and most recent employment and projection data].

⁶³National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, maritime workforce and sealift readiness study materials [VERIFY current report title and citation].

SECTION VIII

Establish a National Maritime Strategy

The United States does not lack maritime programs. It lacks a maritime strategy that connects them.

Consider the list of federal instruments that already touch American maritime policy: the Jones Act.⁶⁴ The Maritime Security Program.⁶⁵ Cargo preference.⁶⁶ Shipbuilding subsidies and financing programs, sealift capacity, port infrastructure investment, the service academies and state maritime academies, the Navy, the Coast Guard, the Maritime Administration, and the Departments of Commerce, Labor, Education, and the Treasury.

Every one of these instruments is real. Every one of them matters. And no single office in the federal government owns the relationship between them. Each is debated, funded, and reformed largely in isolation, as though shipbuilding policy has nothing to do with mariner education, as though cargo preference has nothing to do with sealift capacity, as though the Jones Act's future has nothing to do with the USVI registry's future. It does. Ships require shipyards. Shipyards require predictable orders and available capital. Mariners require schools and sea time. Shipping companies require access to competitive capital and insurance. National security requires commercially viable vessels and a trained workforce in place before a crisis begins, not a plan to assemble them once one has.

Congress should establish a National Maritime Strategy Council, reporting directly to the President, with the explicit mandate to coordinate maritime policy across the departments and programs listed above and to publish a periodic National Maritime Strategy that ties shipbuilding, workforce development, cargo preference, sealift readiness, and international flag policy into a single, coherent plan rather than a dozen unconnected ones. A full legislative draft appears at Appendix B.

This is not a call for a new layer of bureaucracy for its own sake. It is a recognition that the seven pillars of this paper, the Jones Act, allied shipbuilding capacity, domestic industrial commitments, maritime liability reform, the American flag's international expansion, the maritime workforce, and this coordinating strategy itself, succeed or fail together. A shipbuilding program without a workforce strategy fails. A workforce strategy without a demand signal from actual shipbuilding orders fails. A flag-expansion strategy disconnected from the industrial base it is meant to support fails.

Congress has created comparable interagency coordinating bodies for other cross-cutting national priorities, including the National Space Council and the National Quantum Initiative Advisory Committee, both of which offer organizational templates for the National Maritime Strategy Council proposed in Appendix B.⁶⁷

⁶⁴46 U.S.C. § 55102.

⁶⁵46 U.S.C. §§ 53101-53111.

⁶⁶46 U.S.C. § 55305; 10 U.S.C. § 2631, both cited *supra* n.13.

⁶⁷National Quantum Initiative Act, Pub. L. No. 115-368, 132 Stat. 5092 (2018) (establishing the National Quantum Initiative Advisory Committee as a statutory interagency coordinating body). On the National Space Council, the modern Council rests principally on executive action rather than on a freestanding chapter of Title 51 [VERIFY the precise authority relied on before citing it as a statutory precedent]. CORRECTED — an earlier draft cited 51 U.S.C. § 60501 et seq. as the Council's statutory basis.

Someone in the federal government needs to be accountable for whether all seven pillars are moving in the same direction, and today, no one is. A National Maritime Strategy Council would be that someone.

SECTION IX

The Economics of Maritime Leadership

Maritime policy is not transportation policy. It is industrial policy, workforce policy, national-security policy, trade policy, technology policy, and economic policy, all at once.

Maritime policy is too often discussed as transportation policy, a question of how cargo moves from one port to another. That framing dramatically understates what is actually at stake.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis separately reports water transportation's direct contribution to gross domestic product through its Value Added by Industry accounts, a figure that, consistent with the argument of this section, captures only the direct transportation activity and not the shipbuilding, finance, insurance, and education sectors this monograph treats as part of the same economic base.⁶⁸

Consider what a single vessel actually supports across its operating life. Maritime economic-impact studies, including MARAD-commissioned and academic input-output analyses of port and shipbuilding activity, consistently find that direct shipyard and vessel-operating employment understates total economic contribution once indirect and induced effects, the suppliers, service providers, and household spending supported by direct maritime jobs, are included.⁶⁹ A single vessel supports the mariners who crew it and the maritime academies that trained them; the welders, electricians, and engineers who built and maintain it, and the shipyards and repair facilities that employ them; the software and artificial-intelligence systems that now manage its navigation, maintenance schedules, and regulatory compliance; the port terminals that load and unload it; the marine insurers who underwrite it; the banks that financed its construction; the admiralty lawyers who handle its disputes; and the maritime educators, at every level, from apprenticeship to graduate study, who continuously replenish the skilled workforce all of the above requires.

No other piece of transportation infrastructure touches this many sectors of the American economy at once, because no other piece of transportation infrastructure is simultaneously an industrial asset, an employer of skilled labor, a financial instrument, a piece of critical national-security infrastructure, and a platform for continuously evolving technology.

Maritime policy is not transportation policy. It is industrial policy. It is workforce policy. It is national-security policy. It is trade policy. It is technology policy. And it is economic policy.

It is industrial policy, because it determines whether the United States builds ships or imports them, at a moment when global shipbuilding output is concentrated overwhelmingly in China, South Korea, and Japan.⁷⁰ It is

⁶⁸U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, GDP by Industry, water transportation value added [VERIFY current data year and figure].

⁶⁹MARAD and/or Bureau of Economic Analysis, maritime and port-sector economic contribution / input-output studies [VERIFY current studies; candidate sources include MARAD-commissioned economic impact studies of the U.S. shipbuilding and ship-repair industry, and BEA regional input-output multiplier data (RIMS II) applied to maritime sectors].

⁷⁰UNCTADstat / Clarksons Research: in gross tonnage terms, 91 per cent of ships completed in 2025 were built in China, the Republic of Korea or Japan. VERIFIED. For the corresponding U.S. figure, Exec. Order No. 14269 § 1 states that the United States constructs less than

workforce policy, because it determines whether America trains the mariners, welders, and engineers a modern fleet requires. It is national-security policy, because commercial sealift capacity is the capacity the nation actually has available in a crisis, not the capacity it wishes it had. It is trade policy, because a nation's flag and shipping capacity shape its access to, and leverage within, global commerce regulated in part through the International Maritime Organization and reported through UNCTAD's annual Review of Maritime Transport.⁷¹ It is technology policy, because autonomy, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence are now inseparable from vessel design, operation, and registry competitiveness. And it is economic policy, in the most literal sense, because every one of the sectors above generates American wages, American tax revenue, and American capital investment.

The World Bank and the World Shipping Council both track the relationship between shipping capacity and trade competitiveness at the national level, providing additional cross-checks on the trade-policy dimension of this argument.⁷²

Treating maritime policy as any one of these things alone, and ignoring the other five, is how the United States arrived at a shipbuilding capacity below one percent of the world's total while continuing to debate the Jones Act as though the only question that mattered was where steel gets welded. It is not. The question is whether America intends to lead in all six dimensions at once, or in none of them.

one per cent of commercial ships globally. See also OECD Council Working Party on Shipbuilding annual market reports [VERIFY current edition for orderbook-share breakdowns].

⁷¹International Maritime Organization, treaty and regulatory framework materials; UNCTAD, Review of Maritime Transport (annual) [VERIFY current editions and applicable citations].

⁷²World Bank, Logistics Performance Index and trade-related maritime connectivity indicators [VERIFY current edition]; World Shipping Council, industry data and policy publications [VERIFY current citation].

ILLUSTRATING THE STRATEGY

Three Ways to See the Same Argument

Each figure below traces a different piece of the strategy this monograph proposes, from the full maritime ecosystem to the specific mechanism for rebuilding it.

FIGURE 1 — THE AMERICAN MARITIME ECOSYSTEM

A single vessel connects a far larger economic chain than transportation policy typically acknowledges. This figure traces that chain from the ship itself through the mariner, academy, shipyard, and repair yard that sustain it, to the port, insurance, banking, technology, and national-security functions that depend on it in turn. See Section IX for the supporting discussion.

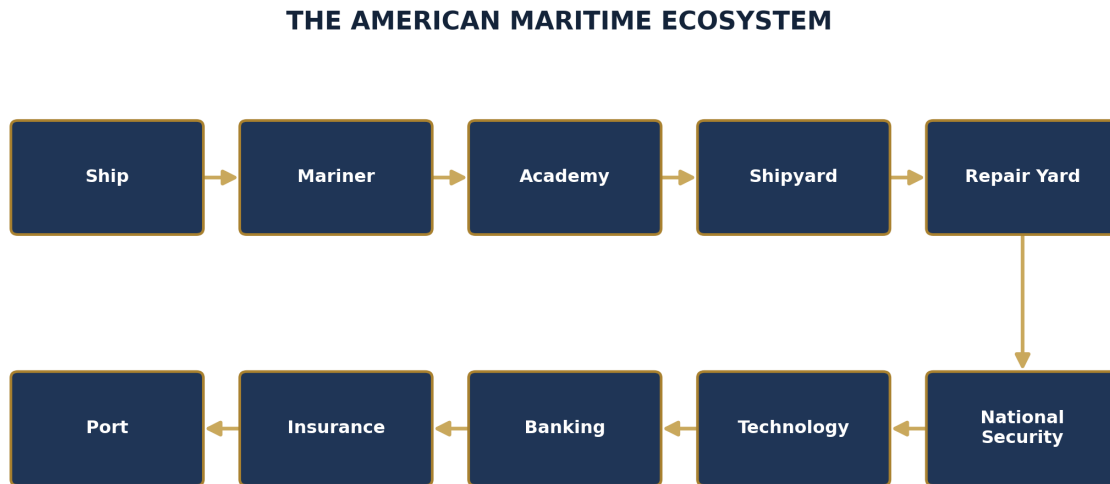


Figure 1. The American Maritime Ecosystem — the chain of American economic activity a single vessel sustains.

FIGURE 2 — FROM TODAY'S FLEET TO RENAISSANCE

Sections III and IV describe a bridge, not a destination. This figure shows the sequence: allied construction, followed by American integration, operations, and maintenance, followed by a domestic shipbuilding base large enough that the bridge is no longer needed.

FROM TODAY'S FLEET TO RENAISSANCE

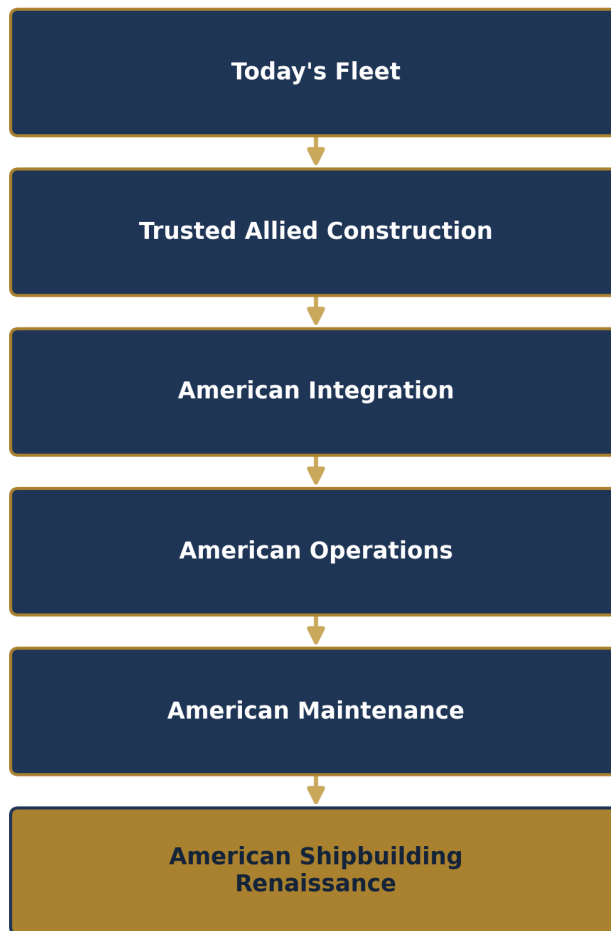


Figure 2. From Today's Fleet to Renaissance — the sequence by which allied capacity leads back to domestic capacity.

FIGURE 3 — THREE PILLARS, ONE STRATEGY

The Jones Act, the Trusted Allied Shipyard Program, and the USVI International Registry are frequently discussed as though they were competing proposals. They are not. This figure shows them as the three sequential components of a single strategy, discussed in full in Section VI.



Figure 3. Three Pillars, One Strategy — how the Jones Act, allied shipbuilding capacity, and the USVI registry combine into a single American maritime renaissance.

CONCLUSION

A Fleet Worthy of the Future

The question before Congress is no longer whether America should preserve the Jones Act. It is whether we possess the courage to modernize it.

America became a maritime nation long before it became an industrial one. Our prosperity has always depended on our ability to build ships, educate mariners, move commerce, and project American influence across the world's oceans.

The Jones Act was never intended to preserve a single industrial process. It was intended to preserve American maritime strength. That distinction matters, and it is the foundation on which every section of this monograph rests.

Today, preserving that strength requires more than defending a statute written over a century ago. It requires rebuilding the entire maritime ecosystem this monograph has described: ships, shipyards, mariners, capital, technology, and the international footprint of the American flag itself. Ships require shipyards. Shipyards require investment. Investment requires confidence. Confidence requires policy. Mariners require education. Education requires opportunity. National security requires commercial capability long before a conflict begins, not a plan to acquire it afterward.

The United States possesses every ingredient necessary to become the world's premier maritime nation once again: a legal framework worth preserving, allies willing to help rebuild what American capacity cannot yet supply on its own, an international registry ready to expand the American flag's reach, and maritime educators prepared to train the workforce all of it requires. What has been missing is not capacity. It has been vision, and the coordinated, legislatively actionable strategy required to act on it. Appendices A through E are offered as a starting point for that legislative work.

The question before Congress is no longer whether America should preserve the Jones Act. It is whether the nation possesses the will to modernize it in a manner that restores American shipbuilding, strengthens American labor, expands the American flag, revitalizes the American maritime economy, and secures American interests for the century ahead.

America's future will once again be written upon the sea. It is time we began building the fleet worthy of that future.

Eric R. Dawicki

*President, Northeast Maritime Institute – College of Maritime Science
Founder, Center for Ocean Policy and Economics (COPE®)*

REFERENCES

Sources Cited, by Tier

Full citations for every footnote in this monograph, organized as recommended: primary legal authorities, government sources, and international and industry sources, with a historical-sources addendum.

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46 U.S.C. § 12103 (vessel documentation and citizenship requirements).

46 U.S.C. § 501 (waiver of navigation and vessel-inspection laws in the interest of national defense).

46 U.S.C. §§ 55101–55127 (coastwise trade, generally); Pub. L. No. 109-304, 120 Stat. 1485 (2006) (general recodification of Title 46, United States Code).

46 U.S.C. § 55103 (transportation of passengers).

46 U.S.C. § 12112 (documentation of certain small vessels).

46 U.S.C. § 12132 (rebuilt vessels).

46 U.S.C. § 54101 (assistance for small shipyards).

46 U.S.C. ch. 537 (Title XI, Federal Ship Financing Program).

46 U.S.C. § 30302 et seq. (Death on the High Seas Act).

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APPENDIX A

Draft Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Act

Model legislative language implementing Sections III and IV of this monograph.

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Act.”

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

Congress finds the following:

- (1) The Merchant Marine Act of 1920 requires that merchandise transported by water between points in the United States be carried in vessels built in the United States, owned by citizens of the United States, and documented under the laws of the United States.
- (2) The domestic shipbuilding industrial base has contracted to the point that United States shipyards are unable to construct oceangoing commercial vessels in sufficient number, at competitive cost, or on competitive schedules to meet the needs of United States vessel owners engaged in the coastwise trade.
- (3) A temporary, tightly controlled program allowing construction of Jones Act-eligible vessels at certified shipyards in trusted allied nations, while preserving all other requirements of the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, will allow United States vessel owners to renew and expand the coastwise fleet while the domestic shipbuilding industrial base is rebuilt.
- (4) Any such program must exclude the People's Republic of China and other strategic competitors as a matter of statute, and must require growing American industrial participation in every certified vessel as a condition of its continued availability.

The purpose of this Act is to establish a Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Program under the conditions set forth in this Act, and to require the sunset of that Program once specified domestic shipbuilding capacity benchmarks are achieved.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

- (1) CERTIFIED NATION.— The term “certified nation” means a foreign nation certified under section 5.
- (2) CERTIFIED SHIPYARD.— The term “certified shipyard” means a shipbuilding facility located in a certified nation and certified under section 5.
- (3) COVERED VESSEL.— The term “covered vessel” means a vessel constructed at a certified shipyard for which certification of Jones Act eligibility is sought under this Act.
- (4) SECRETARY.— The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Transportation, acting through the Administrator of the Maritime Administration, except where another Secretary is specified.

- (5) **STRATEGIC COMPETITOR.**— The term “strategic competitor” means the People's Republic of China and any other nation designated as such by the interagency board established under section 4(b).

SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.

- (a) **IN GENERAL.**— There is established within the Maritime Administration a Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Program (in this Act, the “Program”) under which the Secretary may certify covered vessels constructed at certified shipyards as eligible to engage in the coastwise trade under section 55102 of title 46, United States Code, subject to the requirements of this Act.
- (b) **INTERAGENCY CERTIFICATION BOARD.**— There is established an interagency Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Board, composed of a senior official designated by each of the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Secretary of State, which shall jointly approve or deny every nation and shipyard certification under this Act, and which shall have sole authority to designate additional strategic competitors under section 3(5).
- (c) **EXCLUSION OF STRATEGIC COMPETITORS.**— No shipyard located in a strategic competitor nation may be certified under this Act, notwithstanding any other provision of this Act.

SEC. 5. CERTIFICATION CRITERIA.

The Board may certify a nation and a shipyard within that nation only upon an affirmative finding that the shipyard and the nation in which it is located satisfy each of the following:

- (1) Demonstrated advanced shipbuilding capability and quality-control standards substantially equivalent to standards applicable to United States commercial and naval vessel construction.
- (2) A verifiable industrial-security regime sufficient to protect sensitive design, technology, and supply-chain information associated with covered vessels.
- (3) Demonstrated compliance with United States export-control requirements, including the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2751 et seq.) and implementing regulations, where applicable to work performed at the shipyard.
- (4) Labor standards consistent with United States trade and labor policy, as determined by the Secretary of State in consultation with the Secretary of Labor.
- (5) A mutual defense treaty, status of forces agreement, or comparable bilateral security framework agreement in force between the United States and the nation in which the shipyard is located.

SEC. 6. INITIAL CERTIFIED NATIONS; ADDITIONAL CERTIFICATION.

- (a) **INITIAL CERTIFIED NATIONS.**— Effective on the date of enactment of this Act, and subject to satisfaction of the criteria in section 5, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Republic of Finland are designated as initial certified nations.
- (b) **ADDITIONAL CERTIFICATION.**— The Board may certify additional nations that satisfy the criteria in section 5, including nations not identified in subsection (a), upon petition by the government of that nation or by a prospective certified shipyard, and following a public comment period of not fewer than 90 days.
- (c) **REVOCATION.**— The Board shall revoke the certification of any nation or shipyard that ceases to satisfy the criteria in section 5, or that is subsequently designated a strategic competitor.

SEC. 7. AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL CONTENT REQUIREMENTS.

- (a) IN GENERAL.**— As a condition of certification of Jones Act eligibility, every covered vessel shall incorporate American industrial content consisting, at minimum, of United States naval architecture and engineering design work; United States-sourced electronics and cybersecurity systems where commercially available; United States commissioning and sea trials; and United States repair, maintenance, and retrofit work for the operational life of the vessel.
- (b) ESCALATING DOMESTIC CONTENT PERCENTAGE.**— The Secretary shall by regulation establish a minimum American industrial content percentage, expressed as a share of total vessel construction and outfitting value, of not less than 20 percent for covered vessels certified in the first 5 years after the date of enactment of this Act, increasing by not less than 10 percentage points every 5 years thereafter until the sunset date established under section 9.
- (c) ENFORCEMENT.**— The Secretary shall withhold or revoke Jones Act eligibility certification for any covered vessel that fails to satisfy the American industrial content requirement applicable at the time of certification.

SEC. 8. JONES ACT ELIGIBILITY OF CERTIFIED VESSELS.

Notwithstanding the build requirement of section 55102 of title 46, United States Code, a covered vessel certified under this Act shall be treated as satisfying the build requirement of that section for purposes of engaging in the coastwise trade, provided that the vessel continues to satisfy, and at all times has satisfied, every other requirement of section 55102, including ownership, documentation, and crewing by citizens of the United States.

SEC. 9. SUNSET AND REVIEW.

- (a) SUNSET.**— The authority to certify new covered vessels under this Act terminates on the date that is 15 years after the date of enactment of this Act, or on the date the Secretary certifies to Congress that domestic shipbuilding capacity benchmarks established under subsection (b) have been achieved, whichever occurs first.
- (b) DOMESTIC CAPACITY BENCHMARKS.**— Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the Board, shall establish benchmarks for domestic shipbuilding capacity, including active shipyard count, annual oceangoing commercial vessel completion rate, and skilled shipbuilding workforce size, the achievement of which shall trigger the sunset described in subsection (a).
- (c) EXISTING CERTIFICATIONS UNAFFECTED.**— The sunset of certification authority under this section does not affect the Jones Act eligibility of a covered vessel certified before the sunset date.

SEC. 10. REPORTING TO CONGRESS.

Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter until the sunset described in section 9, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate a report describing: the nations and shipyards certified under this Act; the number and characteristics of covered vessels certified; compliance with the American industrial content requirements under section 7; progress toward the domestic capacity benchmarks established under section 9(b); and any recommended modification to this Act.

SEC. 11. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Act takes effect on the date of enactment.

APPENDIX B

Draft National Maritime Strategy Council Act

Model legislative language implementing Section VIII of this monograph.

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “National Maritime Strategy Council Act.”

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

- (1) Federal maritime policy is presently administered across the Department of Transportation, the Maritime Administration, the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, the United States Coast Guard, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, the Department of the Treasury, and other agencies, without a single coordinating body responsible for the relationship among shipbuilding, workforce development, cargo preference, sealift readiness, and international flag policy.
- (2) The absence of such coordination has contributed to the piecemeal consideration of maritime policy described in Section VIII of the COPE[®] monograph America's Maritime Renaissance (2026), and has impeded the development of a coherent national maritime strategy.

SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNCIL.

There is established, within the Executive Office of the President, a National Maritime Strategy Council (in this Act, the “Council”).

SEC. 4. MEMBERSHIP.

- (a) COMPOSITION.— The Council shall be composed of the following, or their designees: the Secretary of Transportation, who shall chair the Council; the Secretary of Defense; the Secretary of Homeland Security; the Secretary of Commerce; the Secretary of Labor; the Secretary of the Treasury; the Secretary of State; the Administrator of the Maritime Administration; the Commandant of the Coast Guard; and the Chief of Naval Operations.
- (b) ADVISORY MEMBERS.— The Chair may invite representatives of maritime labor organizations, shipbuilders, vessel operators, and maritime academies to serve in a nonvoting advisory capacity.

SEC. 5. DUTIES.

The Council shall:

- (1) coordinate Federal policy affecting the Jones Act, the Maritime Security Program, cargo preference, shipbuilding capacity, sealift readiness, maritime workforce development, and international flag and registry policy;
- (2) identify inconsistencies and gaps among Federal maritime programs and recommend legislative or administrative action to resolve them;

- (3) review and coordinate implementation of the Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Program established under the Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Act, if enacted; and
- (4) prepare the National Maritime Strategy report required under section 6.

SEC. 6. NATIONAL MARITIME STRATEGY REPORT.

- (a) **IN GENERAL.**— Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, and not less frequently than once every 4 years thereafter, the Council shall submit to Congress and the President a National Maritime Strategy report.
- (b) **CONTENTS.**— The report shall address, at minimum: the state of domestic shipbuilding capacity; progress under any Trusted Allied Shipyard Certification Program; the state of the licensed and unlicensed maritime workforce; the status of cargo preference and Maritime Security Program participation; the status of any international registry established under the USVI International Registry Framework Act, if enacted; and specific legislative and budgetary recommendations.

SEC. 7. ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS.

- (a) **STAFF.**— The Secretary of Transportation shall provide staff and administrative support to the Council.
- (b) **MEETINGS.**— The Council shall meet not less than twice each year.

SEC. 8. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There is authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this Act.

SEC. 9. SUNSET REVIEW.

Not later than 10 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to Congress a review of the effectiveness of the Council, together with a recommendation as to whether the Council should be continued, modified, or terminated.

APPENDIX C

Draft USVI International Registry Framework

A model framework combining Virgin Islands territorial legislation with federal recognition, implementing Section VI of this monograph.

PART ONE: MODEL VIRGIN ISLANDS TERRITORIAL LEGISLATION

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “United States Virgin Islands Open International Ship Registry Act.”

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

- (a) FINDINGS.— The Legislature of the Virgin Islands finds that an internationally competitive open ship registry, domiciled in the Virgin Islands and operating under Virgin Islands and United States legal oversight, can attract internationally trading commercial tonnage, generate maritime-services employment within the territory and the United States, and expand the availability of commercial tonnage to support United States national security interests, without affecting the coastwise trade governed by the Merchant Marine Act of 1920.
- (b) PURPOSE.— The purpose of this Act is to establish the United States Virgin Islands Open International Ship Registry (in this Act, the “Registry”) and to authorize its administration under the terms of this Act.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

- (1) REGISTRY.— The term “Registry” means the United States Virgin Islands Open International Ship Registry established under section 4.
- (2) REGISTERED VESSEL.— The term “registered vessel” means a vessel registered under the Registry.
- (3) ADMINISTRATOR.— The term “Administrator” means the entity designated under section 6 to administer the Registry on a day-to-day basis.
- (4) COASTWISE TRADE.— The term “coastwise trade” has the meaning given that term for purposes of section 55102 of title 46, United States Code.

SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF REGISTRY.

There is established the United States Virgin Islands Open International Ship Registry, which shall register vessels engaged in international trade under the terms of this Act.

SEC. 5. ELIGIBILITY FOR REGISTRATION.

- (a) IN GENERAL.— A vessel is eligible for registration under the Registry if the vessel and its owner satisfy applicable international safety, documentation, and ownership-transparency standards established by the Administrator, consistent with international conventions to which the United States is a party.

- (b) **NO COASTWISE ELIGIBILITY.**— Registration under the Registry does not confer, and shall not be construed to confer, eligibility to engage in the coastwise trade. A registered vessel engaging in the coastwise trade must independently satisfy section 55102 of title 46, United States Code.
- (c) **OWNERSHIP TRANSPARENCY.**— The Administrator shall require beneficial-ownership disclosure sufficient to support compliance with United States sanctions, anti-money-laundering, and national-security review requirements.

SEC. 6. ADMINISTRATION OF THE REGISTRY.

- (a) **DESIGNATION OF ADMINISTRATOR.**— The Governor of the Virgin Islands, in consultation with the Center for Ocean Policy and Economics and subject to the federal recognition and oversight provisions of Part Two of this framework, shall designate an Administrator to perform vessel documentation, inspection coordination, and fee collection on behalf of the Registry, consistent with the precedent of privately administered open registries operating under contract with their flag states.
- (b) **STANDARDS AND SAFETY OVERSIGHT.**— The Administrator shall maintain safety, inspection, and documentation standards not less protective than applicable international conventions administered through the International Maritime Organization.

SEC. 7. FEE STRUCTURE AND USE OF REVENUES.

- (a) **FEES.**— The Administrator shall establish registration, tonnage, and annual renewal fees set at globally competitive levels.
- (b) **USE OF REVENUES.**— Revenues collected under this Act shall be allocated, in proportions established by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands in consultation with the Administrator, among: territorial government administration of the Registry; maritime education and workforce development within the Virgin Islands and, through partnership agreements, at mainland maritime academies; and a reserve fund to support Registry operations and marketing.

PART TWO: MODEL FEDERAL RECOGNITION PROVISIONS

SEC. 8. FEDERAL RECOGNITION AND OVERSIGHT.

- (a) **RECOGNITION.**— The Secretary of Transportation, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Secretary of State, shall establish a framework for federal recognition of the Registry, including coordination with United States Coast Guard port state control and flag state oversight functions applicable to registered vessels calling at United States ports.
- (b) **NATIONAL SECURITY REVIEW.**— The Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, shall establish procedures for national security review of registered vessel ownership consistent with subsection 5(c), including coordination with the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States where applicable.

SEC. 9. NATIONAL SECURITY AND EMERGENCY AVAILABILITY.

The Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Transportation shall jointly establish procedures under which registered vessels may be made available, on a voluntary contractual or emergency-requisition basis consistent with applicable law, to support United States sealift requirements during a national emergency, in a manner analogous to the Maritime Security Program established under sections 53101 through 53111 of title 46, United States Code.

SEC. 10. RELATIONSHIP TO THE JONES ACT AND TRADITIONAL UNITED STATES FLAG.

Nothing in this framework shall be construed to amend, waive, or otherwise affect section 55102 of title 46, United States Code, or any other requirement applicable to vessels engaged in the coastwise trade. The Registry is established solely to attract internationally trading tonnage not engaged in the coastwise trade, as described in Section VI of the COPE° monograph America's Maritime Renaissance (2026).

SEC. 11. REPORTING.

The Governor of the Virgin Islands and the Secretary of Transportation shall jointly submit an annual report to Congress and the Virgin Islands Legislature describing Registry growth, fee revenue and its allocation, national security review activity under section 8(b), and any use of registered vessels under section 9.

APPENDIX D

Comparative Registry Analysis

The USVI proposal against the seven registries most relevant to its design.

Registry	Type	Administering Model	Relationship to National Flag	Relevance to USVI Design
Panama	Open registry	Government agency (Panama Maritime Authority)	Sole national flag	Largest open registry by tonnage [VERIFY current figure]; demonstrates open-registry scale is achievable without any ownership nexus requirement.
Liberia	Open registry	Privately administered under contract (LISCR) on behalf of the Liberian government	Sole national flag	Direct precedent for private, U.S.-linked administration of an open registry under government authority.
Marshall Islands	Open registry	Privately administered under contract (International Registries, Inc. and affiliates) on behalf of the Marshall Islands government	Sole national flag	Closest existing precedent: a U.S.-based administrator running an open registry under a sovereign flag-state contract.
Singapore	National + international-trade registry	Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (government statutory board)	Sole national flag, used for both domestic and international trade	Demonstrates a major Asian hub economy competing successfully for international tonnage under strict, high-standard national administration.
Norway (NIS)	Second/parallel registry	Norwegian Maritime Authority	Operates alongside Norway's traditional (NOR) registry	Closest structural precedent for a second, internationally focused registry coexisting with a traditional national flag — the core structural analogy for the USVI proposal's relationship to the traditional U.S. flag.
Madeira (MAR)	International registry within EU member state	Portuguese maritime authority, Madeira Free Trade Zone	Operates as an international registry of Portugal, an EU flag	Demonstrates an internationally competitive registry operating within, not outside, a larger sovereign and regulatory union — analogous to a USVI registry operating within U.S. federal jurisdiction.

Registry	Type	Administering Model	Relationship to National Flag	Relevance to USVI Design
Hong Kong	Major international registry	Hong Kong Marine Department	Registry of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	Demonstrates that a registry tied to a defined jurisdiction short of full national sovereignty can still achieve major international scale — relevant precedent for a U.S. territorial registry.
USVI (proposed)	Open international registry, U.S. territorial	Virgin Islands government authority with private administrator, under federal recognition (Appendix C)	Operates alongside the traditional U.S. flag and the Jones Act coastwise fleet, attracting tonnage neither currently reaches	Combines the open-registry competitiveness of Panama/Liberia/Marshall Islands with the second-registry structural role of Norway's NIS, inside U.S. territorial and federal jurisdiction.

The pattern across all seven comparator registries is consistent: none of the structural elements the USVI proposal requires, open eligibility, private administration under government authority, or coexistence with a traditional national flag, is without precedent.⁷³ **[VERIFY]** What is unique to the USVI proposal is the combination of all three inside U.S. jurisdiction, which is precisely the combination Section VI of this monograph argues gives it strategic value beyond any single comparator registry.

⁷³Comparative flag-state administrative law literature and UNCTAD registry classification data [VERIFY current comparative academic or intergovernmental source treating registry administrative models as a typology].

APPENDIX E

Maritime Workforce Statistics and Projections

An illustrative planning framework for the workforce Section VII describes — not an official government forecast.

Workforce Category	Current (Illustrative)	2035 (Illustrative Planning Target)	2045 (Illustrative Planning Target)
Licensed deck officers (all tonnage)	[VERIFY current MARAD/BLS figure]	Sufficient to crew expanded coastwise and certified-vessel fleet under Sections III–IV	Sufficient to crew a substantially rebuilt domestic fleet under the Section IX(9) sunset benchmark
Licensed engineering officers	[VERIFY current MARAD/BLS figure]	Growth proportional to fleet expansion and LNG/offshore energy demand (Section VII)	Growth sustained through lifelong-learning pipeline described in Section VII
Unlicensed mariners / able seamen	[VERIFY current BLS occupational data]	Expanded apprenticeship and veteran-transition pipeline fully utilized	Pipeline self-sustaining without emergency recruitment measures
Shipyard production workers (welders, pipefitters, electricians)	[VERIFY current MARAD/industry association figures]	Sufficient to meet escalating domestic-content requirements under Appendix A, Section 7(b)	Sufficient to meet post-sunset full domestic construction capacity
Naval architects and marine engineers	[VERIFY current BLS occupational data]	Sufficient to support both certified-vessel American engineering content (Section IV) and domestic design capacity	Sufficient to support a fully rebuilt domestic design and engineering base
Maritime cybersecurity and autonomy specialists	[VERIFY — emerging category, limited historical baseline]	Established as a standard maritime academy specialization track (Section VII)	Fully integrated into standard licensing and continuing-education pathways

This framework is deliberately structured around the same planning horizons used elsewhere in federal maritime policy discussion, near-term (through 2035) and generational (through 2045), consistent with the planning horizons MARAD and the Congressional Budget Office typically apply to long-lived capital and workforce programs, so that MARAD, GAO, and the state maritime academies can substitute validated figures into the same structure without needing to rebuild the underlying framework.⁷⁴ [VERIFY]

About the Author

Eric R. Dawicki, MPA

Eric R. Dawicki is an internationally recognized maritime executive, educator, and public policy strategist whose career has spanned more than four decades in maritime transportation, international regulatory affairs, workforce development, and maritime economic policy with 30+ years as a delegate and lead delegate at IMO. He is the President of Northeast Maritime Institute - College of Maritime Science (NMI), Founder of the Center for Ocean Policy and Economics (COPE®), and President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Dominica Maritime Registry and Chairman and CEO of HALO Education Systems.

⁷⁴Congressional Budget Office, long-term budget and capital-planning outlook methodology [VERIFY typical planning-horizon convention used in comparable CBO long-term infrastructure or workforce analyses].

Since assuming leadership of Northeast Maritime Institute in 1995, Mr. Dawicki has transformed the institution from a regional mariner training school into the United States' first private maritime college, recognized for integrating higher education, professional maritime training, advanced simulation, and digital learning technologies into a comprehensive workforce development model and pioneered educational models that transitioned mariners directly towards US Merchant Mariner credentials and US Coast Guard ratings qualifications. Under his leadership, NMI has become an accredited institution of higher education and an internationally respected provider of maritime education, training, and regulatory compliance services.

Mr. Dawicki has served in both the United States Merchant Marine and the United States Coast Guard Reserve, bringing practical seagoing experience to his work in maritime policy and institutional leadership. His professional background includes shipboard service aboard tankers, liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers, general cargo vessels, and other commercial ships, together with experience in vessel operations, ship management, maritime education, and international regulatory compliance.

For nearly three decades, he has represented maritime interests before the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as a delegate and head of delegation at numerous IMO committees and subcommittees. He previously served as a member of the Board of Governors and Executive Governor of the IMO's World Maritime University in Malmö, Sweden, where he chaired the University's Thirty-Year Sustainability Study. He also served as a member of the United States National Maritime Security Advisory Committee (NMSAC) under both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama Administrations, advising the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Coast Guard on matters of maritime security and transportation policy. He also served as Co-Chairman of the Board for Tall Ship America (formerly the American Sail Training Association)

As President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Dominica Maritime Registry, Mr. Dawicki oversees one of the world's recognized international ship registries, directing global vessel registration, statutory compliance, inspection services, seafarer certification, and implementation of international maritime conventions across an international network.

Mr. Dawicki founded the Center for Ocean Policy and Economics (COPE°) to advance innovative solutions at the intersection of maritime transportation, public policy, ocean governance, economic development, and international cooperation. Through COPE°, he has developed policy initiatives addressing digital maritime administration, international ship registry modernization, maritime workforce development, ocean sustainability, and strategic maritime competitiveness. The present white paper, *America's Maritime Renaissance*, reflects that mission by proposing an integrated national strategy to restore American maritime leadership through coordinated reforms in shipbuilding, education, workforce development, international shipping, and national security.

Mr. Dawicki is a frequent advisor to governments around the world, shipping companies, ports, educational institutions, and international organizations on maritime strategy, regulatory modernization, and workforce development. His work bridges operational maritime experience with public policy, emphasizing practical

solutions that strengthen economic competitiveness while advancing national and international maritime interests.

He holds a Master of Public Administration from The American University in Washington, D.C., with concentrations in Public Affairs, and has pursued executive education in leadership and public policy. Throughout his career, he has remained guided by a simple philosophy that has become synonymous with Northeast Maritime Institute: "Honor the Mariner."