



June 8, 2007

The Honorable Tom Lantos
Chairman,
Committee on Foreign Affairs
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Ranking Republican,
Committee on Foreign Affairs
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman and Madam Ranking Member:

We are writing to you today on behalf of five maritime labor Unions regarding our concerns about an Administration proposal regarding our food aid programs that we believe could do serious harm to our industry. We represent the majority of Americans employed in the handling and carriage of goods and cargo in our ports and on the vessels of the US Merchant Marine.

As you know, one of the key programs that ensures the stability of the merchant marine and provides jobs for our members is the PL 480 Title II Food for Peace program. Over the years, American mariners have carried millions of tons of needed food aid around the globe as part of this program.

In its FY08 budget request, the Administration has proposed the use of up to 25 percent of PL 480 Title II funds to be diverted to cash for local and regional purchase of emergency food aid to assist needy nations.

The Administration has been advocating cash instead of "in-kind" food aid for three years (FY06, FY07, and FY08). Congress has not approved the proposal in the past and should not approve it now because it would divert American taxpayer dollars away from purchases of agricultural products and services here at home.

The current program has been the policy of the U.S. government for over 50 years and has provided every President since Dwight Eisenhower with a valuable foreign policy tool as well as a visible symbol of America's generosity. Both emergency and non-emergency food aid programs are an important component of our Nation's foreign policy. In today's world of shifting alliance, global terrorism and political strife in developing countries, this kind of aid is more important than ever.

A STRONG UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE IS VITAL TO OUR NATIONAL DEFENSE AND ECONOMY.



The success of the Food for Peace program stems from the combination of the American people's compassion and generosity, the unparalleled productivity of our farmers and processors, the dedication of those who administer, transport, and distribute the humanitarian assistance, and the benefits it provides at home to jobs and our economy.

PL 480 Food for Peace is critical to the many working men and women who grow the commodities, bag and store them in our Nation's plants, warehouses and terminals, and transport them on our country's railroads, barges, and U.S.-citizen crewed vessels. Many of these same ships and crew members are also assisting our Armed Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. These workers and this domestic constituency – agriculture, maritime, as well as private voluntary organizations -- have been an invaluable ally in the efforts of Congress to sustain and increase food aid funding year after year.

Your Committee will soon be marking up the trade title to the farm bill, at which time the Administration's proposal -- or a so-called "pilot program" version of the proposal -- may be considered. We urge you to oppose any amendments that would shift in-kind food aid to cash.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our position, and please do not hesitate to call upon us if we may be of service to you.

Sincerely,

Thomas Bethel, American Maritime Officers

John Bowers, International Longshoremen's Association

Tim Brown, International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots

Ron Davis, Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association

Michael Sacco, Seafarers' International Union

cc: House Foreign Affairs Committee Members
House Agriculture Committee Members