



“May you live in interesting times.” Robert Kennedy referred to this phrase as an ancient Chinese curse in a speech he made in 1966. It seems very appropriate when one looks over the expanse of issues confronting the maritime industry today. Maritime seems cursed with the largest legislative plate we’ve had in many years. Defending our foundational programs, pushing for new initiatives to address emerging problems, and continuing to educate the public and our government about the intricacies of this most intricate of all transportation modes have kept all of maritime’s Washington experts busy this year.

As I wrote in my last column, Maritime Security Program funding has been subject to another 1% rescission in the President’s Budget for fiscal year 2008. The industry has begun working directly with House and Senate appropriators to restore that 1% legislatively, as well as working with the Maritime Administration on the issue. In a preemptive move, we have also begun our efforts to secure full funding in the Fiscal Year 2009 budget as well. FY 2009 is a critical year for MSP as it represents the first statutory increase in the authorized funding levels since reauthorization in 2003 – representing an increase of \$18 million for the entire program. The industry has already begun working together to lobby the White House and Capitol Hill to ensure that the necessary funds to continue the success of the program are allocated. The House and Senate are expected to begin work on their FY 2008 funding measures this month.

While the U.S.-flag and U.S.-citizen crew components of the Jones Act are as solid as ever, increasing attention has been focused on the U.S.-build requirements. There are a number of pending lawsuits on the U.S.-build rules, including a suit regarding overseas repairs and rebuilding of Jones Act qualified vessels as well as a similar but unrelated suit challenging the Coast Guard’s definitions for newbuild vessels. The industry has been working hard to keep these issues regarding the Jones Act off Capitol Hill and has largely succeeded. However, it seems clear that there needs to be a consensus on the U.S.-build requirement that has support from all aspects of the industry, including both seagoing and shipbuilding unions, ship operators and the shipyards themselves.

Cargo preference has been back in the news recently, particularly regarding our food aid programs. The *New York Times* published a multi-part series that has been critical of cargo preference, and the *Washington Post*, *Miami Herald*, *Newsday* and a number of other national news organizations have come out in support of the Administration’s attempts to carve \$300 million out of the PL-480 budget to provide direct cash payments to foreign aid recipients, instead of actual grain shipments carried on U.S.-

flag ships. Despite serious concerns regarding the potential effects of the cash program and the existence of a similar program that already provides cash in emergencies, the United States Agency for International Development has continued to push for this major cut into PL-480. Cargo preference and food aid have long been keystone issues for AMC, and our hard work over the last twenty years has produced strong bipartisan support in the House and Senate for keeping PL-480 Title II funding at its current levels and not moving forward with the cash program. As the House and Senate continue their work on this year’s Farm Bill, it is critical that the industry monitors the PL-480 program to ensure that no changes are made that would damage the Merchant Marine.

Besides our three major programs, there are a number of other issues that we in the industry are faced with on Capitol Hill. Two that directly affect merchant mariners are the continuing saga of the Transportation Worker Identification Credential and the proposed revamping of the Merchant Mariner Document. Both programs have been in the works for quite a long time, and both are plagued with a variety of issues that have delayed their implementation. As all aspects of the maritime industry are affected, every sector has their own set of issues which has made engaging Congress difficult. Right now, we are working with the House Transportation and Infrastructure and Senate Commerce Committee staffs to oversee the TWIC and MMD changes so that they are done in a common sense way with minimal direct impact on the seafarer.

The new Democratic majorities in the 110th Congress have brought a major focus on environmental issues, and lately Congressional attention has been focused on our industry. Bills related to ballast water, vessel emissions and the use of low sulfur fuels, and invasive species have all been introduced this year and it is clear that environmental issues will be front and center legislatively for the foreseeable future.

Finally, Congress is continuing to explore ways to recognize the service of Merchant Marine veterans in World War II and other conflicts. A number of bills have been introduced this session, including Congressman Filner’s bill that has already garnered 146 cosponsors in the House.

These issues, coupled with the general pressure to keep spending down, have made for what can only be called “interesting times” in the first session of the 110th Congress. As we move into the appropriations season, AMC will continue moving forward with its educational and legislative agenda on behalf of M.E.B.A. and the entire maritime industry.