

U.S. maritime industry stands ready to help

There is no question that the effects of the ongoing oil spill in the Gulf are devastating to the region and will continue to wreak havoc on the environment as well as the economy going forward.

Unfortunately, by faulting the Jones Act, certain people have not let the facts impede their opportunity for political gain. The U.S. maritime industry, including the various out-of-work Gulf mariners and vessels, remains ready, willing and able to assist in the clean-up.

To be clear, the Jones Act (a set of laws reserving certain intranational shipments to vessels built, flagged and crewed by U.S. citizens) has not hindered in any way, the clean-up efforts in the region. In the instance of the spill, the Jones Act merely sustains preference for U.S. vessels within three miles of the shoreline. The oil spilling from the site of the Deepwater Horizon is located 50 miles from the Louisiana coast.

There currently are a handful of specialized, non-U.S.-flagged vessels operating in the region without a special waiver. Further, the Jones Act was written to accommodate situations such as these. If the U.S. capability does not exist or is not available, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency is able to issue a waiver through a straightforward and speedy process. Once the Coast Guard determines that the U.S. capabilities are insufficient (a process that takes one day), they can immediately gain access to foreign flagged vessels.

To be sure, hundreds of U.S.-flag vessels currently are involved in the Gulf clean-up and thousands more remain available.

The spill was not caused by an American company, but the U.S.-flag industry stands ready to act. Furthermore, the U.S. maritime industry will not stand in the way of any Jones Act waivers that would expedite the efforts to restore the Gulf.

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