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## AMC Perspective

It should come as no surprise that health care reform has dominated the legislative and political atmosphere in Washington D.C. Between hearings, briefings, press conferences, and actual policy development, members of Congress have spent an extraordinary amount of time trying to figure out if and how to pass some form of health care reform. Unfortunately for the maritime industry, this has meant that our agenda was pushed to the back burner.

In order to be most effective in the current political environment, the American Maritime Congress (AMC) has ramped up their efforts to support a viable Short Sea Shipping (SSS) industry. President Obama has stated that, along with health care, the environment, the economy, and energy are among his top priorities. SSS ties in perfectly with the Administration's priorities as it has the ability to lower emissions, save fuel, and create jobs. The first and most important obstacle preventing a viable SSS program is the Harbor Maintenance Tax, a double taxation assessed to cargo shipped from one U.S. port to another. With the help of Congressman Higgins of New York, a legislative repeal of this tax was introduced in the House (H.R. 3486) and currently has 25 cosponsors. AMC is working hard to gather as many cosponsors as possible, so that when Congress starts moving bills again, this popular legislation will be considered.

AMC is working with other maritime unions, carriers, industry leaders, members of Congress, and administration officials to advocate for fair and reasonable emission and ballast water regulations. The Environmental Protection Agency recently released regulations that would effectively eliminate 25% of the Great Lakes fleet within two years should it be implemented. The industry is pushing for the EPA to reconsider the last-minute inclusion of the Great Lakes in their regulations, so that the impact and implementation of the regulation can be studied. It is essential that ballast water regulations are implemented in a uniform manner that does not adversely affect the U.S.-flag.

On September 24th, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure reported the FY 2010 Coast Guard Authorization bill which contained various important maritime pieces. Notably, it creates a Merchant Mariner Medical Advisory Committee to advise the Secretary of Homeland Security on medical examination standards and procedures. Also, in response to repeated industry and labor complaints that foreign vessels and foreign mariners are capturing work that should be reserved to American vessels and crews under the Jones Act, the legislation directs the Coast Guard to enforce the application of the coastwise laws "to vessels that support the exploration, development, and production of oil, gas, or mineral resources in the Gulf of Mexico." The bill seeks to end the current practice whereby mariners are forced to submit to fingerprinting multiple times. Section 815 prohibits the Coast Guard from requiring an individual to be fingerprinted "for the issuance or renewal of a license or document ... if the individual was fingerprinted when the individual applied for a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC)." Finally, the bill includes the text of H.R. 3376 (The United States Mariner and Vessel Protection Act of 2009). Initially introduced by Congressman LoBiondo, the bill states that, "an owner, operator, time charterer, master, or mariner who uses force, or authorizes the use of force, to defend a vessel of the United States against an act of piracy shall not be liable for any injury or death caused by such force to any person participating in the act of piracy." Although previous language addressed more comprehensive measures for armed protection, the AMC applauds Congressman LoBiondo and the Committee for their efforts and this important first step in protecting U.S.-flag merchant mariners.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the AMC at (202) 347-8020 or by mail at 444 North Capital Street, NW, Suite 800, Washington DC, 20001 or e-mail at [amc@americanmaritime.org](mailto:amc@americanmaritime.org).