

MARITIME SECURITY PROGRAM

Thanks to the Defense Department's Maritime Security Program (MSP), the United States military is able to have a sealift capability worth billions of dollars for a small fraction of the price. Enacted in 1996, the MSP provides an annual stipend to ensure 60 militarily useful U.S.-flag, U.S.-crewed ships are available to the military in times of war or national emergencies.

This agreement does much to improve the nation's sealift capability while generating U.S. jobs and revenue. It is the definition of win-win.

Unfortunately, due to budget battles in Washington, funding for the MSP is threatened. The MSP currently is receiving only partial funding during fiscal year 2013 and could face further funding shortfalls in fiscal year 2014. This is because of a set of across-the-board spending cuts known as "sequestration" that went into effect earlier this year when Congress and the administration failed to reach a budget agreement.

The MTD, its affiliates and Port Maritime Councils call upon Congress and the administration to restore the MSP's full financial support. The stakes are simply too high.

This isn't just the opinion of the MTD. A bipartisan collection of members of Congress and top industry leaders also have come to the defense of the MSP, arguing that the country's national and economic security would suffer without a fully funded MSP.

"Without fully funding the MSP, which ensures the continued operation of the nation's commercial maritime security fleet, America would either have to place the safety of our troops and the security of our nation in the hands of foreign shipping interests or be forced to spend billions of taxpayer dollars to achieve the commercial sealift capability that the U.S.-flag commercial industry currently provides," wrote the chairmen of House Subcommittees on Seapower and Projection Forces, Readiness, and Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation.

Maersk CEO John Reinhart also stepped up to urge the administration to fully fund the MSP. If the reductions in MSP funding continue, he said, the program and the country's security could be irrevocably damaged.

“MSP will not be able to maintain its 60-vessel U.S.-flag fleet unless the program is fully funded now and in the future,” Reinhart wrote in a letter to Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. “U.S.-flag vessels lost now may not be available in the future. Such a deterioration of the U.S.-flag merchant fleet is not in the long-term best interest of the U.S. government.”

As the world continues to grapple with unrest and turmoil, the importance of the MSP could not be greater. American forces may be called into action at any moment. The U.S. military must know American merchant mariners aboard U.S.-flag vessels are ready to sail, wherever the mission takes them.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO, its affiliates and Port Maritime Councils continue to support the MSP and the good it does for the nation’s economy and national security and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MTD, its affiliates and Port Maritime Councils will continue to push Congress and the administration to provide full funding to the MSP to so it can continue to perform a much-needed service for the country.