

FOOD FOR PEACE

The American maritime industry's recent victory in Congress protecting the Food for Peace program from disastrous cuts is a deservedly popular topic during this convention. And while the political machinations behind Food for Peace (also known as PL-480) offer many lessons and reminders, we should not overlook the factors that make the program worth fighting for.

The MTD makes no apologies whatsoever for protecting the good American jobs tied to PL-480, including many that are held by members of our affiliated unions. An estimated 44,000 American mariners, port workers, farmers, transportation workers and processors have jobs that depend on the program. If you count other domestic jobs related to Food for Peace, that number swells to around 100,000.

Food for Peace is a proven, time-tested winner that helps people around the world, puts America in a good light and literally saves lives.

As reported by the coalition USA Maritime, although funding is at its lowest point in years, the need for Food for Peace is greater than ever. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 12 million metric tons of commodities are needed each year to fill food gaps in the 70 most "food-insecure" countries. The number of hungry people has increased to 925 million from 833 million at the end of 2002, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

In many cases, Food for Peace is the difference between life and death. And the program has served an essential role in helping stabilize countries, support foreign policy, and build important trade links for our farmers in countries like India, Poland, Romania, and Egypt.

We have said it before but it bears repeating: Food for Peace is not just a handout. It's the sharing of American bounty and American know-how to help rescue those less fortunate from starvation and chronic food shortages. By creating a uniquely sustainable public-private partnership between American faith-based organizations, U.S. industry, and the U.S. government, Food for Peace leverages private and public resources to make a meaningful difference for millions of people in a way that government alone simply cannot.

Moreover, our military leaders have pointed out that the availability of food aid cargoes is essential to maintaining the U.S. merchant fleet, and therefore essential to maintaining our national defense sealift capability. In the MTD, we know this to be true, and we agree with high-profile assessments that any decrease in food aid tonnage would have to be compensated for elsewhere in order to maintain that capability and keep those ships sailing.

The bottom line is that PL-480 works. Replacing the existing program with direct cash payments to foreign countries or non-governmental organizations – as proposed by some – would be imprudent at best, but we'd describe it in stronger terms, such as: foolish, wasteful, and disastrous. Such a move would wipe out American jobs, remove accountability, and undoubtedly harm the people in other nations whose lives literally depend on the sustenance the program provides. As one congressman so aptly put it during a hearing earlier this year, we're much more confident in the likelihood of a 50-pound bag of food ending up in the right hands than a 50-pound bag of money.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO, its affiliates and Port Maritime Councils fully stand behind the Food for Peace program, and unconditionally reject any further erosion of it, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MTD, its affiliates and Port Maritime Councils will continue working to not only preserve the current program but also restore it to proper funding levels that were in place before cuts took place in recent years. We know the fight isn't finished and we'll keep pushing for as long as it takes.