



Bruce K. Butler
Executive Director

NAVY LEAGUE

of the United States



Citizens in Support
of the Sea Services

September 9, 2015

The Honorable Mac Thornberry, full committee chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith, full committee ranking member
The Honorable Randy Forbes, Seapower Subcommittee chairman
The Honorable Joe Courtney, Seapower Subcommittee ranking member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Gentlemen:

As you know, Puerto Rico faces a severe economic crisis, and Congress may consider legislation to assist the Commonwealth. Some have suggested that such assistance legislation include modifications to the Jones Act, the fundamental law of American waterborne transportation. We urge you to oppose any such changes to the Jones Act given the impact on American national security.

The Navy League's position on the Jones Act is clear: "any weakening of the Jones Act would weaken national and economic security." *Navy League 2015-2016 Policy Statement at page 21.* America's sea services—the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine—are highly integrated and particularly essential today "in a world with increasing global instability." *Id.*, at page 1. The Navy League is not alone in that view, of course. Air Force General Paul J. Selva recently said that "without the contribution that the Jones Act brings to the support of our industry there is a direct threat to national security..." Gen. Selva was commander of the U.S. Transportation Command when he made that statement and today he is the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Of course, as you well know, the House Armed Services Committee is solidly on record in support of the need for a strong and healthy domestic maritime industry. Section 3503 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 is widely viewed as the strongest Congressional endorsement of the Jones Act in recent memory.

Exempting Puerto Rico from the Jones Act would undermine national security. The U.S.-mainland-to-Puerto-Rico trade is a major American non-contiguous shipping trade. Ironically, Puerto Rico soon will be served some of the most modern, state-of-the-art vessels in the

American fleet. Exempting Puerto Rico and changing the rules in the middle of the game would cause a ripple effect that would impact the entire American shipping industry. It is noteworthy that the U.S. General Accountability Office (GAO) recently completed the most comprehensive study of the Jones Act in Puerto Rico ever and focused heavily on the impact on national security. GAO correctly noted that “the military strategy of the United States relies on the use of commercial U.S.-flag ships and crews and the availability of a shipyard industrial base to support national defense needs.” GAO reviewed the possible impact of a Jones Act exemption in Puerto Rico, including the potential ripple effect in other U.S. regions. Said GAO, “According to DOD officials, to the extent that Jones Act markets are unable to sustain a viable reserve fleet, DOD would have to incur substantial additional costs to maintain and recapitalize a reserve fleet of its own.”

We urge you to exercise your national security jurisdiction over the Jones Act and ensure that no changes are made to this important law in the context of Puerto Rico or any other context.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Butler", with a long, sweeping underline.

Bruce Butler
National Executive Director, Navy League of the United States

Cc: All Members of the House Armed Services Committee