

Maritime Legislation: Explainer and Next Steps

THE ISSUE

In the coming weeks, Congress will review critical legislation for the nation's maritime industry (shipping, shipbuilding, and ports)—notably, the Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security (SHIPS) for America Act as amended in the 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This *Factsheet* provides an overview of the current national maritime revival and explains how various maritime legislation and executive orders contribute to the revival. The *Factsheet* also includes considerations for Congress and the President on next steps.

BACKGROUND

Legislative action to revive the nation's maritime industrial strength began with the publication in April 2024 of the Congressional Guidance for a National Maritime Strategy spearheaded by then-Representative Mike Waltz (R-FL). That effort has since matured into presidential executive orders and comprehensive bipartisan legislation.

Significantly, the substance of both Congress's measures (such as the SHIPS for America Act) and the President's measures (such as his executive orders and MAP) are aligned and complementary.

CURRENT LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

Most recently, on July 10, the House passed an amendment to the 2027 NDAA that included the majority of the April 2025 version of the SHIPS for America Act. House amendment rules required key revenue elements of the original bill to be moved to a separate bill: the Shipbuilding

Investment and Workforce Act. The Senate is expected to review this amendment and associated bills in conference after summer recess, to include associated maritime industrial legislation.

Subsequently, two related bills are under consideration: One bill in the House, the Facilitating Leadership and Expertise through Exchange and Training in Shipbuilding (FLEETS) Now Act, includes provisions for a Maritime Group of Nations modeled on the G7 to enable maritime industrial coordination with allies. The second bill, in the Senate, the Ready Reserve Force Modernization Accountability Act, directs setting design requirements for an initial 10-ship commercial fleet to meet national security needs, ostensibly setting the stage for creation of a Strategic Commercial Fleet as detailed in the original SHIPS for America Act (bill versions of December 2024 and April 2025).

COMPREHENSIVE BY NECESSITY

The bills being considered, which would influence a decade-long maritime industrial revival, are by necessity complex, and as such, they cross several committees' responsibilities. The comprehensive SHIPS for America Act as submitted April 2025 involves tax code changes (Section 700) to incentivize capital investments into the workforce and infrastructure to modernize and expand the nation's shipbuilding capacity. A critical aspect of the proposed legislation is the creation of a Maritime Trust Fund (Section 701), intended to become self-sustaining to fund the overall revival—such as fees on non-U.S.-flagged shipping (Section 415). The legal basis for fees and penalties on Chinese

shipping and shipbuilding relies on a [Section 301 complaint](#) about predatory Chinese steelmaking and shipbuilding practices. Likewise, long-standing impediments to entry and sustainment of credentials of merchant mariners, as well as incentives to train more critically needed naval architects, are addressed (Section 600). Then, to attract and focus investment on maritime industrial activity, Maritime Prosperity Zones (Section 708) are to be created, and to unleash innovation and accelerate development of a new American maritime comparative advantage, the creation of a Center for Maritime Innovation is authorized (Section 521). Finally, to provide an initial demand for shipbuilding, the creation of a 250-ship Strategic Commercial Fleet (Section 401) is envisioned to serve as a commercially active Ready Reserve Fleet for national security tasking.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONGRESS

For the Senate, a central issue is how to handle the NDAA amendment and separate legislation, such as the Shipbuilding Investment and Workforce Act. One course of action is to remove the amendment to the NDAA and consolidate maritime legislation as originally envisioned: the SHIPS for America Act. A second consideration is whether to incorporate the FLEETS Now Act and Ready Reserve Force Modernization Accountability Act into an expanded comprehensive stand-alone bill. However, should the various bills be kept separate, congressional leadership should consider creation of a Select Committee for Maritime Industrial Revival tasked with coordinating across various committees; this is prudent either way.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PRESIDENT

To support the legislative process, the President could, per the recommendation clause (U.S. Constitution Art. II, Sec. 3), submit a recommended comprehensive maritime bill that both the House and Senate would take up in conference while considering the above bills. Additionally, the President could take executive

action and order provisions of the above bills be implemented, such as by establishing a Maritime Group of Nations and naming a Maritime Security Advisor to the President.

CONCLUSION

The nation's maritime revival is at a historic moment. Since its inception, it has been a bipartisan, bicameral effort—and remains so. Now, Congress has before it several bills that together are intended to memorialize the needed authorities and provide vital initial resources to begin the generational task of rebuilding the strategically important maritime industry. The actions of the 119th Congress will decide whether this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity is seized or allowed to pass at grave national peril.

CURRENT MARITIME LEGISLATION WITH SPONSOR(S):

- April 2025 version of the SHIPS for America Act, currently sponsored in the Senate by Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Todd Young (R-IN).
 - Last action was on May 1, 2025; at that time there were 29 Senate supporters (15 Republican, 14 Democrat), and 140 House supporters (75 Democrat and 65 Republican).
- SHIPS for America Act, as amended in the 2027 NDAA, offered by Representative Trent Kelly (R-MS).
- Shipbuilding Investment and Workforce Act, submitted by Representatives Mike Kelly (R-PA) and Nathaniel Moran (R-TX).
- FLEETS Now Act, submitted by Representative Young Kim (R-CA).
- Ready Reserve Force Modernization Accountability Act, submitted by Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Dave McCormick (R-PA).