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COMMITTEE ON
**TRANSPORTATION
& INFRASTRUCTURE**

SAM GRAVES, CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

Chairman Ezell Statement from Hearing on Building America's Maritime Infrastructure

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Washington, D.C. - *Opening remarks, as prepared, of Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee Chairman Mike Ezell (R-MS) from today's hearing, entitled "America Builds: Maritime Infrastructure":*

Before I get into my remarks on the topic of this hearing today, I first want to send my condolences to all who were impacted by the tragic accident last week near the DCA Airport. Suzette and I send our thoughts and prayers and thank all the first responders, including the Coast Guard, that were there in the immediate aftermath.

Today the Subcommittee meets for its first hearing of the 119th Congress and continues the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's "America Builds" series to discuss the nation's maritime infrastructure. It is clearly critical that we must build a safer and more efficient system.

I'm also happy to say this is my first hearing as Subcommittee Chairman. I'm excited to lead the Subcommittee this Congress in addressing the many important issues facing the maritime industry. I look forward to working under the leadership of Chairman Graves in this position.

Continuing on today's topic, America's Marine Transportation System consists of the navigable waterways, commercial ports, and land-side connections which help to move millions of passengers and billions of dollars' worth of cargo every year.

Nearly all of the country's inbound or outbound cargo is transported by ships requiring a robust system of maritime infrastructure to ensure the movement of goods. Ports play a prominent role within this system, providing access to connections for cargo to move inland to final destinations, and outbound for export overseas.

Marine terminals – within each port – load and unload cargo. That cargo is then transported both domestically to other points in the U.S. – also known as coastwise trade – or it is moved internationally to foreign markets.

In order to participate in coastwise trade between two domestic points, a ship must be *Jones Act*-qualified, meaning the ship is U.S.-built, U.S.-crewed, and U.S.-owned.

The *Jones Act* is a fundamental statute for the domestic maritime industry. The *Jones Act* is quite literally the bedrock and foundation of our nation's shipbuilding industrial base because it helps to maintain a pool of qualified American mariners that we rely on to transport goods and our military, in times of peace and war.

Unfortunately, the rise of the shipbuilding industries of global competitors has led to a decline in our own shipbuilding capacity. Coastal Mississippi and the Gulf Coast as a whole, is home to several shipyards employing thousands of Americans. I look forward to discussing ways to reinvigorate this critical industry.

In order to promote the domestic maritime industry, the Maritime Administration in the U.S. Department of Transportation administers several programs that fund projects to construct and expand maritime infrastructure and U.S. shipbuilding.

I hope to look at the current operation of each of these programs to find ways we can improve them and look forward to recommendations from our stakeholders here today.

Additionally, autonomous maritime technologies are creating new challenges requiring us to reassess current maritime infrastructure to ensure their safe operation. The U.S. Coast Guard is in charge of developing a framework from which these new technologies can safely operate. However, development for these technologies outpaces the regulatory rulemaking process.

We understand the Coast Guard will need to focus on developing regulatory standards that provide for the adequate testing and safe integration of these technologies into the Marine Transportation System, and appreciate any insights you can provide.

Thank you all for being here today and I look forward to discussing the build-out of America's maritime infrastructure.

Click [here](#) for more information from today's hearing, including video and witness testimony.

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