

**The original documents are located in Box D22, folder “Propeller Club of the United States Convention and American Merchant Marine Conference, Honolulu, HI, October 11, 1967” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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Remarks By  
The Honorable Gerald R. Ford  
Minority Leader  
House of Representatives  
Congress of the United States  
Washington, D. C.

At  
Propeller Club of the United  
States Convention/American  
Merchant Marine Conference  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
Wednesday, October 11, 1967

For too many years, our country has been woefully deficient in its shipping capability. How a nation so great and so resourceful could come to such a predicament defies rational explanation! The reasons are many, but, simply stated, while we as a people have been preoccupied with phony missile gaps and genuine credibility gaps, the inadequacies of our merchant marine have been ignored and have steadily become more critical. As a consequence, our seapower - our power on the oceans - has diminished, and our national interests are endangered.

Today, our merchant fleet is not only in the doldrums, it has been sinking fast. The American flag merchant marine includes only about 900 vessels, and two thirds of these are obsolete, inefficient and noncompetitive.

Our fleet now carries less than 7.2% of our foreign trade and commerce. Job opportunities for both seamen and shipyard workers have slipped to nearly half of their post-war high.

The Russians, the Japanese, the Scandinavians, and others, are outbuilding us and out-trading us for the cargoes of the world. This situation is not only disgraceful; it is downright dangerous. We can no longer honestly call ourselves a first-class maritime nation!

Since the escalation of our participation in the Vietnam war three years ago, these facts have been either purposely concealed or minimized by an Administration mesmerized by its own self-delusion.

No less an oracle than the Secretary of Defense has repeatedly prophesied that airplanes can take the place of ships in the carriage of troops and military materiel. Vietnam has proven him grossly wrong - 98% of our military cargoes and approximately 70% of our military personnel have been transported to that remote corner of the world by ships - not by air.

To cover up the absence of a constructive Administration maritime program, it has been necessary to reactivate some 160 mothballed World War II vessels. Many of these ships could hardly qualify for the usual stamp of American excellence. With their deteriorated condition, unreliable machinery and corroded equipment, it is no wonder they have frequently been described as "rust buckets."

Now, we have come to the end of the line. Figurately speaking, we have already scraped the bottom of our maritime barrel. There are only a few serviceable vessels remaining in our national defense reserve fleets. Our active fleet has been strained to the utmost in supplying logistic support to our forces in Vietnam. And, two thirds of this fleet plus all remaining ships in our reserve fleet are 20 or more years old and obsolete.

Still, there is no admission of error on the part of the Secretary of Defense or his associates. No Administration appointee at The Pentagon has come forward with a positive, unequivocating statement that a strong, well balanced, active, modern, efficient American flag merchant marine is fundamental to our strength on the oceans and essential to our national

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Meanwhile, Soviet Russia has taken the initiative by building ships at a maddening rate. Very shortly, it is expected that the Communist shipping fleet will be larger than ours. The U.S. and other trading nations of the world could well be at their mercy - the Russians will indeed control the sealanes to the detriment of free people everywhere.

In spite of the mounting evidences of Russia's growing maritime strength; in spite of Congressional reports - by the House Republican Policy Committee, by the House Merchant Marine & Fisheries Committee, by the Senate Commerce Committee and by the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee - warning of this increasing danger, the Johnson Administration has downgraded the importance to the United States of supremacy on the high seas. The evidences are available for all to see. In fact, the Undersecretary of Commerce for Transportation two years ago made this amazing statement:

" . . . We do not believe that our concept of the merchant marine should necessarily be one of keeping up with the U. S. S. R. "

In other words, through neglect and a complete lack of even minimum countermeasures, the United States should permit the Russians to gain control of the shipping lanes of the world by default. This is only one aspect of the destructive neglect which has marked the past few years.

Until only recently, top Navy spokesmen were severely restrained in the extent to which they could publicly endorse the relationship of a

strong merchant marine, with supporting shipbuilding facilities, to American sea power.

Until only recently, we have had to witness the efforts of another Cabinet officer, the Secretary of Transportation, to persuade our citizenry that a merchant marine is not really important to our national welfare and that our nation doesn't really need a shipbuilding industry to survive. The naivete of the Transportation Secretary's understanding of maritime and shipyard problems was in direct proportion to the Defense Secretary's incorrect prophecies.

However, two decisive votes in the Congress of the United States have now apparently convinced these two highly placed officials - and presumably The White House - that a majority of the American people do not want their ships - the lifeblood of seapower - constructed in other countries, and that before the national campaigns of 1968 are launched, a maritime program of significant proportions had to be initiated. After many years and months of inertia on the part of the Administration, this is now apparently an imperative objective.

But, to reach this point, the dedicated endeavors of many members of the Congress have been necessary. This has been a bi-partisan project, and I am proud of the part which my Republican colleagues have played. Congressmen Bill Mailliard of California, the ranking minority member of the Merchant Marine & Fisheries Committee, Congressman John Rhodes of Arizona, Chairman of our Republican Policy Committee; Congressman Ed Reinecke of California; Congressman Tom Pelly of

Washington, Congressman Jack Edwards of Alabama, Senator Dirksen of Illinois, Senator Tower of Texas, and Senator Cotton of New Hampshire - to mention only a few - have been in the forefront in forging a climate for a "new maritime policy" which the President of the United States promised more than three years ago.

This overdue policy and program has only been revealed in sketchy outline. There are not enough details to permit any kind of analysis in depth, and we, on the Republican side of the aisle, are not yet able to say with any certainty that the proposed approach will produce results which will satisfy our national needs in the 1970's.

For example, these questions are typical of those that need to be answered before a reasoned judgment can be made:

(1) Does the program, as offered by the Administration, contemplate a substantial increase in the carriage of our expanding trade and commerce aboard American flag ships?

(2) If so, what percentage figure (comparable to the present 7.2%) has been used in the formulation of this program for attainment at what specific point in time?

(3) If so, what determinations have been made as to the numbers and types of ships in the various categories (cargo ships, tankers, container ships, drybulk carriers and so on) which will be required to meet the above objective?

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(9) Does the Administration plan to sponsor an infusion of research and development in merchant marine areas of a magnitude comparable to that provided the aircraft industry? If so, over what period of time?

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I am sure you would agree that these are not unfair questions of partisan motivation. To me, the answers should compose the building blocks for any sensible, constructive program for rejuvenation of the American merchant marine. Without them, it seems to me, we will have only a superficial, helter-skelter effort of doubtful verity and debatable promise, as in so many other Great Society programs.

This American Merchant Marine Conference can help in providing

input for answers to these questions, and with the variety of talents, experience and disciplines represented in this gathering, I would anticipate that your opinions will carry great weight in Washington - with the Democrats as well as the Republicans.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to present my thoughts on the important problems now before you.





CONGRESSMAN  
**GERALD R. FORD**  
HOUSE REPUBLICAN LEADER

**NEWS  
RELEASE**

--FOR RELEASE IN THURSDAY AMS--  
October 12, 1967

REMARKS TO BE READ ON BEHALF OF REP. GERALD R. FORD (R.-MICH.) TO THE PROPELLOR CLUB OF THE UNITED STATES CONVENTION AND AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE CONFERENCE AT THE ROYAL HAWAIIAN HOTEL, HONOLULU, Oct. 11, 1967  
(The Minority Leader was unable to attend because of House business.)

For too many years, our country has been woefully deficient in its shipping capability. How a nation so great and so resourceful could come to such a predicament defies rational explanation! The reasons are many, but, simply stated, while we as a people have been preoccupied with phony missile gaps and genuine credibility gaps, the inadequacies of our merchant marine have been ignored and have steadily become more critical. As a consequence, our seapower--our power on the oceans--has diminished, and our national interests are endangered.

Today, our merchant fleet is not only in the doldrums, it has been sinking fast. The American flag merchant marine includes only about 900 vessels, and two thirds of these are obsolete, inefficient and noncompetitive.

Our fleet now carries less than 7.2% of our foreign trade and commerce. Job opportunities for both seamen and shipyard workers have slipped to nearly half of their post-war high.

The Russians, the Japanese, the Scandinavians, and others, are outbuilding us and out-trading us for the cargoes of the world. This situation is not only disgraceful; it is downright dangerous. We can no longer honestly call ourselves a first-class maritime nation!

Since the escalation of our participation in the Vietnam war three years ago, these facts have been either purposely concealed or minimized by an Administration mesmerized by its own self-delusion.

No less an oracle than the Secretary of Defense has repeatedly prophesied that airplanes can take the place of ships in the carriage of troops and military materiel. Vietnam has proven him grossly wrong--98% of our military cargoes and approximately 70% of our military personnel have been transported to that remote corner of the world by ships--not by air.

To cover up the absence of a constructive Administration maritime program, it has been necessary to reactivate some 160 mothballed World War II vessels.

(more)

Many of these ships could hardly qualify for the usual stamp of American excellence. With their deteriorated condition, unreliable machinery and corroded equipment, it is no wonder they have frequently been described as "rust buckets."

Now, we have come to the end of the line. Figuratively speaking, we have already scraped the bottom of our maritime barrel. There are only a few serviceable vessels remaining in our national defense reserve fleets. Our active fleet has been strained to the utmost in supplying logistic support to our forces in Vietnam. And, two thirds of this fleet plus all remaining ships in our reserve fleet are 20 or more years old and obsolete.

Still, there is no admission of error on the part of the Secretary of Defense or his associates. No Administration appointee at The Pentagon has come forward with a positive, unequivocating statement that a strong, well balanced, active, modern, efficient American flag merchant marine is fundamental to our strength on the oceans and essential to our national interests. There are those who know this, but they have been muzzled.

Meanwhile, Soviet Russia has taken the initiative by building ships at a maddening rate. Very shortly, it is expected that the Communist shipping fleet will be larger than ours. The U.S. and other trading nations of the world could well be at their mercy--the Russians will indeed control the sea-lanes to the detriment of free people everywhere.

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However, two decisive votes in the Congress of the United States have now apparently convinced these two highly placed officials--and presumably The White House--that a majority of the American people do not want their ships--the lifeblood of seapower--constructed in other countries, and that before the national campaigns of 1968 are launched, a maritime program of significant proportions had to be initiated. After many years and months of inertia on the part of the Administration, this is now apparently an imperative objective.

But, to reach this point, the dedicated endeavors of many members of the Congress have been necessary. This has been a bi-partisan project, and I am proud of the part which my Republican colleagues have played. Congressmen Bill Mailliard of California, the ranking minority member of the Merchant Marine & Fisheries Committee, Congressman John Rhodes of Arizona, Chairman of our Republican Policy Committee; Congressman Tom Pelly of Washington, Congressman Jack Edwards of Alabama, Congressman Ed Reinecke of California; Senator Dirksen of Illinois, Senator Cotton of New Hampshire, and Senator Tower of Texas--to mention only a few--have been in the forefront in forging a climate for a "new maritime policy" which the President of the United States promised more than three years ago.

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# # #

Appropriation Bills  
H. Conf. — Transp. — Indep. Ob.  
NASA appropriations

3 Appropriation Bills for H. Conf. + Supple-

> Recession — The various sub-comm. have been  
meeting —  
interior — \$14 — out of \$16 plus  
Legislative — no fig. yet —  
P. O. — Dept. Health about curtail  
of serv. if Congress goes thru with recession of \$5 b  
- Bow — 60 economic pressure & having an  
effect on Senate conferees in conf. on approp. bills

Byrnes — The surplus proposal is not dead for this  
year. No bill has even been <sup>formally</sup> introduced. But the respr  
of the fiscal mess is what we're looking for — on the  
89th Congress — a healthy Dem. Congress — The Juddman  
> Go back to 1966 camp. speeches — I say "I told you so."

② Put emphasis on getting control over fed. spending

"As things have developed, I don't think we could have  
written a better script ourselves."

\* We have further record now for the liberal economists,  
that a billion in spending cuts has more bite than an equivocal  
cut in taxes ~~for~~ as an anti-inflation move

Cleveland — Congr. Reform — Offered resol. calling for  
action on the Senate Congr. Reform bill — Bill voting tomorrow  
Juddman has called for action on it. This does not mean Bill  
is by ~~him~~ endorsing all the provisions in the bill — just call for action on  
Cederberg — Powell — ~~Held~~ Baker — apply near. <sup>reformation</sup>  
Vote Vote

Rumor that Congress will adjourn early in  
Nov. — Admin. has abandoned tax inv. bill &  
Sec. Sec. bill & That Perry wants Congress to  
get out of here —







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