

U.S. Merchant Marine loses a friend and leader with the death of Congressman Elijah Cummings

Maryland Democratic Congressman Elijah Cummings — a friend of the U.S. Merchant Marine and a stalwart advocate on Capitol Hill — died on Thursday, October 17. He was 68.

Representing Maryland's 7th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1996, Congressman Cummings was the chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, a senior member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and a member of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials and the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, on which he had previously served as chairman.



"Congressman Cummings truly recognized and deeply appreciated the value of the U.S. Merchant Marine and all of its roles — from quality career opportunities for young Americans to strategic military sealift service unequaled around the globe," said American Maritime Officers National President Paul Doell. "He fought hard on Capitol Hill to uphold and advance the laws and programs that form the collective keel of the U.S.-flag merchant fleet, battling on maritime policy and particulars to keep America's fourth arm of defense intact.

"He was a bastion of knowledge and strength, a voice of leadership and a true friend to mariners, and he will be sorely missed," Doell said.

After the U.S.-flag cargo preference share of U.S. government impelled food-aid shipments was cut by 25 percent as part of a measure to fund surface transportation projects in 2012, Congressman Cummings led the effort to restore the lost cargo preference share and the lost jobs and U.S.-flag capacity resulting from that ill-advised cut by sponsoring the Saving Essential American Sailors Act.

Congressman Cummings was recognized with the Maritime Industry Salute to Congress Award by the International Propeller Club of the United States in 2013 for his steadfast support of the U.S. Merchant Marine and American maritime sector.

During his acceptance speech, he criticized a separate effort to undermine the shipment of U.S. food-aid cargoes to nations in need and urged those present to contact members of Congress to explain the detrimental impact such a move would have on the American job base and U.S. defense sealift capabilities.

"The Food for Peace Program has supported American interests domestically by providing markets for our agricultural products and supporting our merchant marine, and internationally by providing food aid to impoverished countries in desperate need," he said. "If we don't take action we won't have a merchant marine

capable of serving as a naval and military auxiliary and our national objective will be left dependent on the interests of foreign-flag vessels operated by foreign mariners.

"This would be an intolerable situation and frankly a risk to our national security and it does not have to be this way," he said.

Congressman Cummings worked to safeguard and sustain the Jones Act, affirming the importance of the law and the American industry it supports throughout his career in Congress and during the same speech in 2013.

"A subject near and dear to me is the Jones Act," he said. "Let me be very clear, the Jones Act must remain the compass by which we steer our nation's maritime policy."

Among the numerous boards and commissions on which Cummings served, he spearheaded an effort to strengthen the Maritime Transportation Technologies Program at New Era Academy (NEA) in Baltimore, and served as chairman of the NEA Maritime Advisory Board, and as chairman of the Maritime for Primary and Secondary Education Coalition.