

# BIG RIVER COALITION



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The Honorable David Vitter  
516 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Vitter:

The Big River Coalition (BRC) would like to thank you for introducing the Senate version of the Maritime and Energy Workforce Technical Training Enhancement Act, H.R. 2923. The Coalition's membership is confident that your bill would benefit Louisiana's robust maritime and energy industry through industry-specific training at Louisiana's community and technical colleges. The BRC and other maritime stakeholders remain concerned about the lack of qualified training programs for the next generation of maritime and energy professionals.

Your Senate bill proposes the creation of a new program that would directly address the critical need to train workers in the maritime and energy industries. The bill includes awarding grants and creating centers of excellence program in maritime and energy workforce training.

The strength of the United States as a maritime nation is related to the strength of its global, coastal and inland waterways, commercial fleet, its ports and intermodal facilities, and the maritime workforce that supports and operates U.S.-flagged vessels. The marine transportation system is a core component of our economic and national security, and it is vital to the growing domestic energy industry. Louisiana's community and technical colleges are prominent among the nation's institutions of higher education that have established maritime and energy workforce training.

While the maritime workforce has proven to be strong and resilient, there is a need to upgrade the skills and capacity of the industry to ensure the future viability of the Merchant Marine. Jobs in the maritime industry, with a wide scope, continue to boom with international activity at seaports and inland ports.

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These jobs include operating and maintaining vessels, as well as staffing of numerous positions at port facilities. Education and training requirements vary depending on the type of job. Bachelor's degrees are required for marine officers and engineers, but qualification for most maritime employment positions can be obtained through associate degrees.

The Maritime and Energy Workforce Technical Training Enhancement Act would authorize grants to support capacity building in critical maritime training categories, including the following:

- Maritime transportation, logistics, supply-chain management, shipbuilding, dredging operations and ship repair.
- Training for such positions as tankerman, deckhand, able body seaman, firefighting, pilot training, maritime technologies, marine diesel technician, marine gasoline engine technology, marine electrical, marine mechanical, maritime logistics, and maritime welding.

The BRC truly believes Louisiana's industries would benefit from the increased workforce development capacity-building assistance under this proposed legislation. The Coalition and its members remain concerned about the future of workforce development and appreciates your support and leadership.

The Big River Coalition is committed to protecting maritime commerce across the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MRT). The Coalition focuses on maximizing transportation efficiencies on the deep-draft ship channel from Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico. As concerns grow about the future management of the Mississippi River system, and efforts are increased to help reduce or prevent adverse impacts related to flood protection, protecting water supplies, recreational boating, fishing, invasive species, coastal restoration, and minimizing the negative impacts of runoff and pollutants, it is critical to the nation's economy that navigation remains unimpeded. The best economic estimates available indicate that the MRT has over a \$200 billion annual impact on the economy of the United States. Therefore, as visions of the future of the MRT are shaped, it is imperative that navigation representatives strive to ensure that systematic approaches protect maritime trade by maintaining fully authorized channel dimensions while also updating and maintaining our navigation infrastructure, specifically the locks and dams along the MRT. The Big River Coalition missions are focused on securing increased funding from the Harbor Maintenance Tax and the Inland Users Fuel Tax, efforts to deepen the Lower Mississippi River to 50 feet and to increase the beneficial use of dredge material or "sediment recycling."

Sincerely,

**Sean M. Duffy, Sr.**

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