MARAD Needs More U.S.-Flag Ships to Strengthen Maritime Commerce and Transportation

ARLINGTON, Va. – Kevin Torkarski, associate administrator for Strategic Sealift for the Maritime Administration (MARAD), said strengthening maritime commerce and transportation are vital to controlling the sea, but MARAD can't meet those demands in its current state.

"It's great to have a naval force. The naval force isn't as strong as we want it to be, and we know that. But how are we doing with controlling the sea with maritime commerce? We're not," said Tokarski, during a Navy League special topic breakfast on Aug 3.

Our power as a nation comes from the ability to move weapons, ammo and resources to the right place, Torkarski explained. In that way, transportation not only enables the nation's economy but protect our nation as well.

"There are a lot of very important pieces," Torkarski clarified, "but when it comes to it at the end of the day, you got to be able to move people, put things in certain places. As we say in the transport community, 'Nothing happens until something moves.'"

Torkarski explained if you can't get resources to your bases of operation, you've more or less lost the battle – a lesson other nations have learned from watching the U.S as a powerhouse of the sea.

"All of us from a maritime perspective need to come together with the realization that we need a stronger maritime presence at sea," he said.

According to Torkarski, the current administration understands the need to strengthen maritime transportation. The next step, however, is how. How do you revive the U.S. maritime commerce to its former glory? Tokarski believes providing more U.S.-flag ships would change a lot, including adding much-needed mariners.’

“Cargo preference is not a dirty word. Cargo preference is a sound policy that when the federal government buys things and ships goods and services, we’re going to use U.S.-flag ships … to the maximum extent. My agency believes in that.”

To further support the law, Tokarski added, “Cargo preference buys us readiness.”

Tokarski knows him and his colleagues have been frequently repeating their cry for support as of late, but because of their consistent message, he believes MARAD could see beneficial changes to come in the near future.

“It is a message that is worth repeating,” Tokarski said. “It’s almost like sending out an SOS. You don’t do it one time. You got to keep doing it. I think it’s a good parallel of where we are at as a maritime nation.”