MARAD's Buzby: National Maritime Strategy 'a Matter of National Will'

WASHINGTON – A National Maritime Strategy is soon to be released, the U.S. Maritime Administrator said.

Maritime Administrator Mark H. Buzby, speaking Feb. 20 at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Analysis, a Washington think tank, said that a "National Maritime Strategy was directed by Congress in the 2014 Coast Guard Authorization Act" and that a draft "was waiting for me in my in-box when I showed up in August 2017. We've been working on that."

"The final version of that strategy – or the recommendations of the strategy – are about to be released" … "very shortly, within days or a week or two," Buzby said.

"Constructing a National Maritime Strategy is going to be a matter of mustering national will," he said. "It will move the ball quite a ways down the road and be a good path forward."

He was speaking at the roll-out of CSBA's new report, "Strengthening the U.S. Defense Maritime Industrial Base: A Plan to Improve Maritime Industry's Contribution to National Security."

Buzby said he had concerns about "the ability of our aging Ready Reserve Force [RRF] and relatively small remaining commercial U.S. Merchant Marine and mariner pool to meet this country's needs in a protracted, all-hands-on-deck sealift effort."

He said the results of the Sept. 19 turbo-activation of the RRF and Military Sealift Command's (MSC's) surge sealift ships showed a disappointing level of readiness on short notice.

He said that of the 61 ships – 46 RRF and 15 MSC – only 39 were ready to go on Sept. 16 when the activation was initiated, of which 33 were chosen for activation.

“Recapitalizing that force has been a focus of Congress, [which] has authorized the purchase of ships – we’re doing that right now with the Navy,” he said.

Buzby said the need for tankers has not been adequately addressed, citing for the need of a “bucket brigade of fuel necessary in a major conflict across the Pacific to keep everything running.”

He said more than 80 tankers would be needed to sustain U.S. forces in a major conflict.

“That need needs to be filled from someplace,” he said.

Buzby also pointed out that the in a protracted sealift operation voluntary civilian mariner force would be short about 1,800 mariners.

He also noted that of the seven shipyards that built sealift ships in the 1984 to 2002, only four are in operation and only one – NASSCO – is still in the business of building merchant and sealift ships.