

# Maritime Administrator Details Priorities for His Agency at Navy League Breakfast



Maritime Administrator Mark Buzby during his speech at Navy League on Aug. 21. Danielle Lucey/Navy League of the United States

ARLINGTON,

Va. – The man in charge of the Maritime Administration (MARAD) laid out his priorities for the agency in a speech that included course corrections for the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, shoring up the Ready Reserve Force and defending the Jones Act.

Maritime Administrator Mark Buzby, a retired Navy rear admiral, spoke Aug. 21 in Arlington at a breakfast hosted by the Navy League of the United States and his first priority was getting the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy “back on track.”

*Rear Adm. Mark Buzby on maritime strategy during his recent visit to Navy League. @CSPAN <https://t.co/7tSUVw0EpU>*

*– Seapower Magazine (@SeapowerMag) [September 4, 2019](#)*

Check out video from Mark Buzby’s visit by clicking the C-Span link above.

He said the academy had been on a “not good course for the last few years” with some leadership problems, including sexual harassment issues. He

said the new superintendent, Rear Adm. Jack Buono, and the new academic dean, John R. Ballard, were a “dynamic duo [that] really turned things around.”

Buzby added that the “culture has turned around” and that “the midshipmen have taken ownership of the issue.”

He said his second priority is to ensure that the Ready Reserve Force (RRF) is “ready to answer the call.”

The RRF is a fleet of sealift ships kept in a reduced operating status manned by a skeleton crew that can be activated for service normally in five days, though some are activated for use on occasion, including two serving today. No-notice activations are conducted each year to test the ability to get underway. Buzby is concerned that some of the RRF ships are so old that many parts are not even manufactured any more.

“Today, the RRF is at 76% readiness,” he said.

Buzby said programs are underway to modernize the RRF, including service-life extensions for some ships out to 60 years; buying newer used ships and modernizing them; and building new ships. The first two ships are being procured

with \$61 million  
by 2021.

The MARAD  
administrator's third priority is to make a vigorous defense  
of the Jones Act,  
a 99-year-old law – officially the Merchant Marine Act of 1920  
– that in  
general requires that cargoes carried between U.S. ports be  
carried on ships  
that are U.S.-built, U.S.-crewed and U.S.-owned.

The Jones Act  
is “under attack on many, many fronts,” he said.

There are  
about 40,000 Jones Act-compliant vessels of all sizes in the  
United States but  
only 99 are large, ocean-going vessels, he said, plus 81 are  
involved in  
international trade. Together, those 180 ships proved the  
employment pool of  
merchant mariners to provide crews for the RRF.

“We’re about  
1,800 mariners short,” Buzby said, about 45 ships worth of  
crew members. “We  
need more places for people to work in peacetime.”

“If you took  
the Jones Act away, those American jobs would, in all  
likelihood, go away,” he  
said. “You are talking about the majority of the ships that  
employ  
unlimited-tonnage mariners, so it would have a tremendous  
impact on our  
national security and our economic security.”

One challenge with the RRF is that ship engineers with

experience with steam plants are increasingly fading away, but 24 of the 46 RRF ships are steam-powered. Buzby also said that MARAD expects to award \$293 million early next year in a port infrastructure development program. MARAD typically spends \$20 million each year for small shipyard initiatives and \$7 million in marine highway grants.

See video of Buzby's Navy League speech [here](#).