

SECNAV Advocates Increased Legal Immigration to Increase Shipbuilder Workforce



Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro visits industry booths during the Navy League of the United States' Sea-Air-Space Exposition 2024 at National Harbor, Maryland, April 9. *U.S. Navy | MC2 Jared Mancuso*

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The secretary of the Navy said the shortage of workers in the U.S. shipbuilding industry could be partially alleviated by allowing more legal immigrants into the country to work in the shipyards.

Speaking April 23 at the Stimson Institute, a Washington think tank, SECNAV Carlos Del Toro acknowledged that supply chain

issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the ability on shipyards to meet delivery schedules of Navy ships, said he thought “the bigger problem than that ... is actually the lack of blue-collar workers that we have in this country.

“Regretfully, we’re a pretty divided country politically, you might say, but it really is time for Congress to get together and pass comprehensive reform and increase the amount of legal immigration that we actually allow into this country [and] increase the amount of work visa programs that are authorized for blue-collar workers to come from other nations and actually do the work here as has actually existed since the founding of our government, very much so,” Del Toro said.

The SECNAV noted the current unemployment rate in many U.S. states is low, “but what we’ve got to do is open up the spigot a bit, basically, on legal immigration to allow blue-collar workers to come here and also to devote an enormous amount of resources into re-training individuals so they can actually work in our shipyards and be employed by the types of trades that are open to shipyard workers, for example.”

Del Toro noted the U.S. government will in the next five years “be pumping in \$15 billion investment into the submarine industrial base alone and an additional billion-dollar investment into the surface industrial base as well.”

The SECNAV also noted that the atrophied U.S. commercial shipbuilding industry needs to be reinvigorated by a “whole-of-government effort around a national maritime statecraft.”