With Order, Trump Eases Path for Transition to Merchant Marine

ARLINGTON, Va. — President Trump has issued an executive order easing the path for active-duty military personnel and veterans who want to transition to service as merchant mariners, a move designed to open jobs to veterans while strengthening national security.

The executive order, issued March 4, stated its purpose as promoting "employment opportunities for United States military veterans while growing the cadre of trained … mariners available to meet … requirements for national and economic security."

Many current and former sailors and Coast Guardsmen have extensive experience in ship-handling, navigation and engineering applicable to service in the merchant marine, but in the past, they have faced bureaucratic obstacles and expenses in the thousands of dollars to make the transition.

"It is the policy of the United States to support practices and programs that ensure that members of the United States armed forces receive appropriate credit for their military training and experience, upon request, toward credentialing requirements as a merchant mariner," the order stated. "It is further the policy of the United States to establish and maintain an effective merchant marine program by providing sufficient support and resources to active-duty and separating service members who pursue or possess merchant mariner credentials."

The order continued: "A robust merchant marine is vital to the national and economic security of the United States.

Credentialed United States merchant mariners support domestic and international trade, are critical for strategic defensive and offensive military sealift operations and bring added expertise to federal vessel operations. Unfortunately, the United States faces a shortage of qualified merchant mariners. As our strategic competitors expand their global footprint, the United States must retain its ability to project and sustain forces globally. This capability requires a sufficient corps of credentialed merchant mariners available to crew the necessary sealift fleet. Attracting additional trained and credentialed mariners, particularly from active-duty service members and military veterans, will support … national security requirements and provide meaningful, well-paying jobs to … veterans."

Trump ordered the secretaries of defense and homeland security to, within a year, identify all military training and experience within the applicable service that may qualify for merchant mariner credentialing and submit a list of military training and experience to the Coast Guard National Maritime Center to determine whether such training and experience counts for credentialing purposes.

The secretaries also are to provide for waiver of licensing fees for active-duty personnel and pay for Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) cards.