MARITIME INDUSTRY PREPARES FOR BUSY LEGISLATIVE STRETCH

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With a presidential election looming and a crowded congressional calendar on the horizon, July is shaping up to be one of the busiest months in recent history for the American maritime industry. The sprint to the August congressional recess will see major maritime measures actively in play over the next five weeks:

- First in the queue is the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the must-pass annual reauthorization effort includes the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) authorization bill and funds most key commercial maritime government programs. The Senate is expected to resume floor consideration of the NDAA when the chamber returns from July 4 recess. The House Armed Services Committee completed its full committee markup on July 1, and floor action is expected the third week of July.
- A Senate version of the FY21 MARAD authorization bill was introduced by Commerce Committee Chairman Roger Wicker on June 10. The bill includes funding for MARAD and many other commercial maritime programs. No timeline has been set for Senate Commerce Committee consideration, but it will serve as the basis for a Senate floor amendment to the Senate NDAA.
- The House Appropriations Committee plans to begin markups the week of July 6, with floor votes as early as the week of July 20. The 12 annual spending bills include FY21 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD), which funds MARAD and other maritime governmental programs; FY21 Homeland Security, which funds the U.S. Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection; and FY21 Energy & Water Development, which funds the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Senate Appropriations Committee markup schedule is less certain, but committee and subcommittee action is also possible in July.
- The House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee and Senate Commerce Committees continue their efforts to finalize a Coast Guard authorization bill for FY21, legislation that includes Coast Guard funding, as well as dozens of provisions of interest to the American maritime industry.
- The House recently secured final passage of the Moving Forward Act, a more than $1.5 trillion infrastructure package that funds everything from roads, bridges, highways, transit, clean energy, to water infrastructure. The bill is not expected to be taken up in the Senate; however, there are possible opportunities to conference items in a pared down Senate bill.
- Activity in July is also likely on efforts to reauthorize water resources projects. The Senate's bill, America's Water Infrastructure Act, may see floor action later in July, while the House is expected to release its committee draft in the coming weeks.

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- Finally, there has been speculation that Congress will turn its attention to another COVID-19-related stimulus bill in the last two weeks of July. With an anticipated price tag in the trillions, the legislation could touch all sectors of the American economy.

After a hectic sprint to the August recess, the House is scheduled to adjourn for recess on July 31, while the Senate will depart on August 7. Both chambers are then expected to return on September 8, before adjourning in early October for the run-up to the November 3 presidential election. Maritime stakeholders looking for opportunities for engagement in the legislative process should note that the next few weeks could present their best opportunity.

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