

## **Area leads nation in maritime jobs, report says**

Keith Magill

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Southeast Louisiana leads the nation in the number of maritime jobs, a new industry report says.

The industry supports 33,590 jobs and has a \$9 billion-a-year economic impact in Louisiana's 1st Congressional District, which stretches from the New Orleans area west into southern Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes.

The Transportation Institute's figures, released last week, come from a study the industry lobbying group commissioned from the consulting and accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, or PwC.

"From the Mississippi River to Port Fourchon, the maritime community in southeast Louisiana keeps our state and our country's economies moving," U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Metairie, who represents the district, said in a news release.

The jobs are critical to the transportation of goods and to offshore energy exploration and production, he said.

Both he and the Transportation Institute used the data to support their longstanding push to ensure the Jones Act remains intact.

The 1920 law -- the subject of long-running debate in Congress -- requires ships that carry goods between the nation's ports to be built, owned and registered in the U.S. and have crews of at least 75 percent U.S. citizens.

Proponents say the law keeps maritime jobs in the U.S., prevents the nation from becoming dependent on foreign ships and ensures a ready merchant fleet in case of war.

"Sustaining these highly skilled positions and a thriving industrial base in Louisiana and across the country ensure America will always have a knowledgeable and ready maritime workforce to build, maintain and strengthen our naval capabilities," Scalise said. "When our shipbuilders and maritime workers are able to thrive, the entire country benefits."

Critics say the law is antiquated and limits foreign competition for shipbuilding and other maritime jobs, resulting in higher costs for U.S. consumers.

"The protected domestic shipbuilding industry has a captive market from which it benefits handsomely and seeks to preserve by promoting fallacious arguments about the law's necessity to national security, while the vast costs are dispersed across the economy in the form of higher prices, inefficiencies and forgone opportunities," the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute says in a position paper released in June.

“That such a burdensome law has evaded meaningful reform for nearly 100 years speaks to the determination of a small, well-organized, well-connected class of producers and unions that have succeeded over the years in portraying any effort to reform or repeal the Jones Act as an affront to national security,” the Washington-based think tank says. “The time has come to finally turn the tables and for Congress to repeal this onerous law.”

In Houma-Thibodaux and across Louisiana, some of the biggest employers are maritime and shipbuilding companies. Locally, they include Galliano-based Edison Chouest Offshore, Lockport-based Bollinger Shipyards and Houma-based Cenac Marine Services, which about two weeks ago announced its sale to Kirby Corp. of Houston for \$244 million.

Louisiana has the highest number, nearly 6,300, of boat captains, mates and pilots of any state, according to the latest data from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. About three of every 1,000 jobs in the state fall into that category, 13 times the national average and the highest concentration in the U.S.

The Houma-Thibodaux area, comprised of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, employs 2,040 people in those jobs, a number that ranks No. 4 among 600 areas nationwide, including 394 metro areas, the federal data show. About 24 of every 1,000 local jobs fall into that category -- 97 times the national average and by far the highest concentration of any U.S. community.

The state and nation also post some of the highest numbers in other maritime job categories, including ship engineers, boat crew members and riggers.

“Louisiana is the nation’s top job-producing state for the entire domestic maritime industry, supporting 70,000 family-wage jobs and contributing over \$18 billion to the national economy,” said James L. Henry, chairman and president of the Transportation Institute. “The findings in our most recent study demonstrate the strength and necessity of the Jones Act, which serves as the backbone of the American maritime industry, the U.S. industrial base and the hardworking men and women that crew the vessels that deliver both in times of war and peace.”