



Think tank fires billboard broadside at Jones Act

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A libertarian think tank is taking its fight against the Jones Act to the streets.

Washington-based Cato Institute has rented two billboards on interstate highways near Newark Liberty International Airport in northern New Jersey and in the northeast Bronx, blaming the nearly-century old law for creating traffic jams while directing drivers to BlameJonesAct.com.

"Less than 5% of the volume of US domestic freight is transported by water, whereas the comparable figure in Europe is 20%," said Dan Ikenson, the director of Cato's Herbert A. Stifel Center for Trade Policy Studies.

"Ending the Jones Act would alleviate the nation's growing traffic problem and many other problems."

The law, passed in 1920, requires ships carrying goods between American ports are US-built and crewed.

In a paper last summer Ikenson, Colin Grabow and Inu Manak argued, in part, that without the Jones Act more cargo would be transported via water, taking tractor-trailers off the country's highways and decongesting its busiest rights of way.

Proponents of the law say protecting the domestic shipping industry creates jobs and drives investment while serving US national security interests.

BlameJonesAct.com brings visitors to a page called the "Cato Institute Project on Jones Act Reform" with links to posts, papers and videos on the issue.

The billboards are the latest broadside against the Jones Act to come out of Washington.

Last month, Republican senator from Utah Mike Lee introduced legislation to repeal the law.

In a release, he said without the Jones Act "all qualified vessels" would be able to engage in US domestic trades.

"It is long past time to repeal the Jones Act entirely so that Alaskans, Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans aren't forced to pay higher prices for imported goods," he said.

The American Maritime Partnership said if the bill became law it would "outsource hundreds of thousands of American jobs."

Lee had submitted similar legislation twice prior, once in 2010 and once in 2017.