

# WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

## Waiver Should Have Come Sooner — Repeal Can't Come Soon Enough

October 4, 2022

Hurricanes have brought devastation to America's shores, and we must do whatever is necessary to provide relief.

*"The damages we are seeing are catastrophic,"* Gov. Pedro Pierluisi told the Associated Press as Hurricane Fiona unleashed landslides on the island territory, SunGazette.com reported in late September.

The damage from Hurricane Fiona makes the Biden administration's slow pace on one clear step toward relief frustrating. And it makes years and years of congressional inaction inexcusable.

The Jones Act allows only U.S.-flagged cargo ships to transport cargo between American ports. On Wednesday of last week, the Biden administration and Department of Homeland Security finally heeded the calls of activists and legislators and waived the Jones Act.

While we appreciate that the Biden administration made the correct decision, we are frustrated they could not make this decision on what, according to Politico.com, U.S. Rep. Nydia Velazquez, D-New York, correctly described as a *"life and death situation"* sooner.

But while the Biden administration should have acted days earlier, the brunt of the blame must fall on Congress, who have had years of opportunities to repeal the Jones Act.

The Cato Institute four years ago spelled out how the *"archaic, burdensome law"* drives consumer prices higher — particularly for consumers on islands like Puerto Rico and Hawaii — by limiting competition and artificially inflating shipping costs. The Cato Institute also noted that the impact of driving up shipping costs pressures manufacturers to use other means of delivering goods when possible. These dots connect to more trucking, with more wear and tear on America's highways, more traffic congestion.

The impetus for passing the Jones Act in 1920 was to preserve domestic shipbuilding. But in the century that has passed under the Jones Act's enforcement, shipbuilding has still steeply declined.

But while the Jones Act fails to accomplish its stated goal and instead drives up consumer prices and contributes to our traffic woes, its role as an obstacle to hurricane relief for Puerto Rico is likely the most clear reason Congress needs to finally act.

The U.S. House and Senate should repeal the Jones Act as soon as they can.