



Letter to the editor: Jones Act is in need of reform

Colin Grabow

Apr 10, 2021

Highlighting the role of the Jones Act in river transport, a recent editorial (“Suez Canal, WV rivers are different worlds ... mostly,” March 30) speculates that few West Virginians would like to see foreign vessels on local waterways. Perhaps. But it seems doubtful West Virginians would be concerned with the use of foreign-built vessels, which is also prohibited by the 100-year-old law. Even as foreign-built trucks, autos, and aircraft are widely found in our skies and highways, the Jones Act denies Americans the right to use vessels built in other countries for domestic commerce. Beyond diminishing the efficiency of U.S. transportation, this prohibition is at great odds with the values of a country based on individual liberty.

West Virginians may also be interested to learn that while the state is the country’s 6th-largest producer of natural gas, the Jones Act prevents other Americans from consuming this product. Instead of buying natural gas from West Virginia, Puerto Rico and New England import it from as far away as Africa and Europe because the Jones Act-compliant ships necessary for transport don’t exist due to their extreme cost of construction. The United States is the world’s leading exporter of propane — a byproduct of natural gas processing — yet Hawaii imports it due, yet again, to a lack of appropriate ships for transport.

After a century of existence, this law is urgently crying out for reform.

Colin Grabow

Washington, D.C.