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A broad coalition of American labor organizations has responded to the establishment of a flag of convenience open registry shipping regime in the U.S. Virgin Islands:

“On behalf of the licensed and unlicensed American merchant mariners who have proudly and without fail served our country since its founding, we oppose in the strongest possible terms the creation of an open registry in the Virgin Islands, a territory of the United States.

“Open registries exist so that shipowners can increase their profits by avoiding the same rules, regulations, tax obligations and manning requirements that attach to a national flag fleet. This latest effort is nothing more than an exercise in labor arbitrage designed to generate registry fees and to enrich foreign shipowners at the expense of American workers and America’s national interests.

“The proposed U.S. Virgin Islands flag of convenience open registry will not benefit the United States nor America’s maritime industry, any more than any other second or open registry benefits a national flag country. In fact, the establishment and growth of second registries by other industrialized nations has done little more than decimate their national flag fleets to the point that they are no longer able to provide the requisite military security and logistical support to their flag nations.

“At its core, this proposal, allowing for the operation of vessels with foreign mariners under a United States open registry, is an affront to the American mariners who have always put themselves in harm’s way whenever called upon by our nation. Their service, most recently recognized by Congress with the awarding of a Congressional Gold Medal to World War II American merchant mariners, demonstrates a clear and unwavering commitment on the part of American merchant mariners to supply and support American troops deployed around the world, with no regard for their own safety. American mariners believe that our servicemen and women and their families deserve no less.



“The military security of the United States will not be strengthened by relying on foreign owned and foreign crewed vessels. The safety of American troops deployed overseas and the success of their mission must not be put in jeopardy by a reliance on a flag of convenience open registry scheme that utilizes foreign crewed vessels to deliver what our servicemen and women need to do their job in our behalf.

“Finally, if the supply chain crisis has taught us anything it is that we, as a country, must begin to reverse the dangerous reliance we have on foreign sources for goods and for shipping services. Increasing America’s dependence on foreign owned and foreign manned vessels will exacerbate the current situation and will not somehow magically enhance America’s maritime posture.

“We call upon the Department of Defense, the Maritime Administration, the Biden Administration and the Congress to reject any suggestion that United States Virgin Islands-flag vessels be treated as if they are U.S.-flag and U.S.-crewed vessels for any purpose or for any program. At the same time, we reiterate our commitment to work with the Administration and Congress to achieve a more robust, commercially viable U.S.-flag, U.S.-crewed fleet that will continue to protect America’s economic, military and homeland security.”

David Connolly, President, Sailors Union of the Pacific

Paul Doell, President, American Maritime Officers

Daniel Duncan, Secretary-Treasurer, Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO

Don Marcus, President, International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots

Anthony Poplawski, President, Marine Firemen’s Union

Greg Regan, President, Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

Michael Sacco, President, Seafarers International Union

Adam Vokac, President, Marine Engineers’ Beneficial Association

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