

CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN  
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD INSERT  
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Mr. Speaker, today is National Maritime Day, an occasion on which we note our maritime heritage and the importance of this industry to the commerce and defense of the United States.

This morning -- as part of the official observance of National Maritime Day -- I was honored to be invited to take part in the Merchant Marine Memorial Service held on the West Side Capitol Steps and to offer the following remarks.

(Remarks attached.)

Today we meet to honor our maritime past -- and to look forward to the future. This memorial service is not just to pay tribute to those seafarers who gave their lives for our country. More important, it is for us who are here today -- because the value of our maritime past lies in what the future can draw from it.

Our past is prologue. And our most meaningful tribute to that past and to those who died will be what we do in the future. Today then is a time for us to reflect, a time for us to seek out the direction and purpose the past holds for what can come.

Many of you have been part of the United States merchant marine all your professional careers. By contrast, my own association is a recent one.

In this short time I have developed high regard and immense respect for our maritime industry and its people. I have learned a great deal about our traditions and history, our problems, and our capabilities.

The United States merchant marine is our fourth arm of defense -- and our first arm of commerce -- serving both the private sector and as a naval auxiliary. It is an essential part of the national and international policy of the United States.

From the earliest of days of our republic the merchant marine has played a key role -- a role marked by innovation, productivity, and direction. In more recent years, however, our industry has lost momentum, so that today finds it adrift in a sea of uncertainty.

It's a time of change, a time to challenge. <sup>And</sup> ~~But~~ we can be on the threshold of a new day. This tomorrow is uncertain, but it is a tomorrow bright with hope. This tomorrow can draw from our maritime past and unleash its creativity, its energy, its adaptability.

But the merchant marine we are paying tribute to at this service is not just an industry, not just ships, not just goods. Our merchant marine -- like all industries -- is fundamentally people. Its strength rests on the quality of its men and women.

As Chairman of the subcommittee responsible for maritime education, I know the people of our industry. They are dedicated. They are well-trained. They are competent. I am optimistic about the future of our merchant marine because of this underlying strength of our men and women. Our past inspires confidence in our future.

Today we are assembled to take note of the past and to honor those who have died in wartime service to country. Our merchant mariners have indeed served heroically. The statistics speak for themselves. These civilians served voluntarily, and they suffered frightening casualties.

For the most part our merchant mariners have been unsung heroes -- just as our merchant marine has been unsung. Heroes like Lim Poon,

a young seaman whose ship was sunk in the South Atlantic by an Italian submarine in 1942. He spent the next 133 days alone on a raft in the open seas before being rescued by a Brazilian fishing boat -- a record of endurance that still stands unexcelled in the annals of human history. As a result of this feat of courage, President Truman signed a special bill to make Lim Poon a United States citizen. And perhaps of even greater significance, Lim Poon then returned to the sea, and now a man of 64 years of age still serves in our merchant marine.

People like Lim Poon have made our industry. Our past is proud, the record unmistakable. American ships and American seafarers have been there when it counted and they did the job that needed to be done.

Today we are gathered here to commemorate this past. Let us make our tribute a magnificent and living memorial, a memorial that moves beyond words. It's the dawning of a new day, a day noted by people -- our men and women -- who will honor this past by the maritime industry we sustain and build.

As we embark on this epic voyage, may we all enjoy Godspeed, fair winds, and following seas.