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USW Files Section 301 Petition on Shipbuilding

(PITTSBURGH) – The United Steelworkers union (USW) today led a coalition of labor organizations in filing a Section 301 petition, calling on the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to initiate an investigation of Chinese commercial shipbuilding.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC), over the past two decades, enacted a comprehensive strategy to dominate global transportation and logistics networks, including employing an array of non-market policies. Meanwhile, U.S. shipbuilding capacity continues to diminish.

“The United States once had nearly 30 major shipyards; now we’re down to just a handful,” said USW International President David McCall. “That correlates with more than 70,000 lost shipbuilding jobs, not to mention all the secondary jobs the industry supports.”

A single commercial ship can require approximately 13,000 tons of structural steel, 60,000 gallons of paint, 130 miles of electrical cable, and many other products tens of thousands of USW members proudly produce.

“The PRC is using commercial shipbuilding to dominate the full spectrum of global trade, choking out all competitors,” McCall said. “If we do not act quickly, we will soon be dependent on China not only for the products their vessels bring into our ports but also for the ships themselves.”

McCall noted that in addition to the grave economic consequences of the PRC’s policies, the growing imbalance in shipbuilding also threatens U.S. national security.

“China has surpassed the United States and now operates the world’s largest navy,” said McCall. “Rebuilding our Merchant Marine is not only essential to increasing our nation’s sealift capability, it will help shore up the critical supply chains our military and commercial shipbuilding industries share, making us safer and more resilient.”

Other unions joining the USW in filing the trade petition include the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department.

U.S. Sens. Tammy Baldwin and Bob Casey today sent a letter to the Biden administration in support of the trade petition, representing a growing coalition of policymakers fighting to revitalize the shipbuilding industry.

“Labor unions and the Biden administration have worked together to establish a worker-centered trade policy and ramp up domestic manufacturing capacity through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act,” said McCall. “Reviving the commercial shipbuilding industry will enable America to expand those investments, ensure a steady supply of goods at home and grow the middle class.”

USTR Katherine Tai has 45 days to determine whether she will pursue an investigation of Chinese shipbuilding.

*The USW represents 850,000 workers employed in health care, metals, mining, pulp and paper, rubber, chemicals, glass, auto supply and the energy-producing industries, along with a growing number of workers in, public sector, higher education, tech and service occupations.
For more information: www.usw.org.*

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