AMERICAN MARITIME INDUSTRIAL COALITION
PROJECT 2027 | POLICY OUTLOOK | OCTOBER 30, 2026

Midterm Elections and the Maritime Agenda

Outlook for the SHIPS for America Act, the Maritime Executive Orders, Maritime Prosperity Zones and China Port Fees

Prepared by: Fair Kim
Co-Founder, AMIC – American Maritime Industrial Coalition | Partner, Carlough Solutions
Published by: American Maritime Industrial Coalition

Overview

The November 3 midterm elections are less likely to change who is championing the maritime agenda than to change how, and how quickly, that agenda can move through Congress. The lead sponsors of the main maritime legislation come from both parties, and most are either not up for election this year or are expected to keep their seats. What the election will decide is which legislative paths remain open, who holds the committee gavels, and how much time is left to act.

This summary looks at four parts of the maritime agenda in turn, followed by the themes that cut across all four and the key dates to watch.

Issue	Where it stands	What the election changes
SHIPS for America Act	Much of it is in the House version of the annual defense bill; the Senate has not passed its version	Whether the bill is finished in the short post-election session and on whose terms
Maritime Prosperity Zones and shipyard tax credit	Two House bills awaiting action in the tax-writing committee	Whether a one-party fast-track tax bill remains possible
Executive orders and Maritime Action Plan	In effect; much of the plan still needs Congress	Whether the administration is legislating its agenda or defending it
China port fees	Suspended; extension to early January 2027 proposed	Which majority shapes the decision on whether the fees return

1. SHIPS for America Act and the Defense Bill

Summary

The Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security (SHIPS) for America Act is the most comprehensive maritime revitalization bill in decades. Rather than move on its own, much of it is now riding on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the annual defense policy bill that Congress has passed every year for more than six decades. The House included a large share of the SHIPS Act, along with parts of the administration's Maritime Action Plan, in its version of the bill. The Senate has not passed its own version, so the final text will most likely be negotiated directly by the leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Key points

- **The timing is tight:** final action will most likely come in the "lame-duck" session between the election and the start of the new Congress in January, and that session must also deal with a December deadline to keep the government funded.
- **The sponsors see this year as the window:** they have said publicly that they cannot count on a better environment after the election.
- **A change in House control raises the stakes:** members leaving the majority will want to lock in maritime provisions while they still chair the committees.
- **Contested items are most at risk:** an incoming majority may hold out on provisions such as requiring more government and commercial cargo to move on U.S.-flag ships.

2. Maritime Prosperity Zones and the Shipyard Tax Credit

Summary

The tax side of the maritime agenda faces a harder road, because tax measures generally cannot be attached to the defense bill. For the same reason, the tax portions of the SHIPS Act were left out of the House defense bill. Two companion House bills carry the main tax proposals, and both remain with the House Ways and Means Committee, which writes tax law.

- **H.R. 9911 (Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Pennsylvania)** would designate up to 100 Maritime Prosperity Zones (MPZs), modeled on the Opportunity Zones created in the 2017 tax law.
- **H.R. 9921 (Rep. Nathaniel Moran, R-Texas)** would create a tax credit for shipyard investment, generally 25 percent, rising to 35 percent for investments inside an Opportunity Zone.

Key points

- **Two realistic paths:** a year-end tax package, or a budget reconciliation bill, a fast-track process that lets the majority party pass tax and spending measures without support from the other party.
- **Reconciliation depends on the election:** it works only if one party controls both the House and the Senate.
- **A split Congress means renegotiation:** both bills would need bipartisan support, likely with changes to how zones are selected, which businesses qualify, and whether smaller shipyards get a fair share of the benefit.

3. Executive Orders and the Maritime Action Plan

Summary

The President's executive orders on maritime dominance and the administration's Maritime Action Plan will remain in place whatever the election outcome. Much of what they call for, however, still requires Congress: new legislation, a dedicated trust fund to pay for maritime programs, and annual funding.

Key points

- **From offense to defense:** a divided Congress would shift the administration's focus from passing its maritime agenda to defending it, with the annual funding process and congressional oversight as the main tools.
- **Oversight could test consistency:** questions are likely about policies that sit uneasily with the agenda, such as the administration's extended waiver of the Jones Act, the law requiring that cargo moving between U.S. ports travel on vessels that are U.S.-built, U.S.-owned and U.S.-crewed.
- **Funding is the real test:** the plan's goals depend on Congress providing a reliable source of money, not just authorizing programs.

4. China Port Fees

Summary

In 2025 the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) imposed port fees on Chinese-built and Chinese-operated vessels calling at U.S. ports, in response to a petition from shipbuilding labor unions. The fees were suspended within weeks as part of a broader trade agreement with Beijing. That suspension, set to expire November 9, is now proposed to be extended to early January 2027 while negotiations continue.

Key points

- **Lost revenue:** supporters of the fees, including labor unions, argue that the pause has delayed money that could have supported U.S. shipbuilding.
- **Security concerns:** national security experts warn that Chinese state-owned shipping and shipbuilding companies are closely tied to the Chinese government and pose espionage risks, and that repair, modification and construction work should shift to allied and, over time, U.S. shipyards.
- **The new Congress will be in the room:** because the new deadline falls just days after the new Congress is sworn in, whichever party holds the majority will be positioned to influence whether the fees return, are suspended again, or are replaced by a broader fee on all foreign-built ships.

Themes Across the Four Issues

- **A closing window:** every part of the agenda faces a deadline in the next ten weeks, and anything not finished this year starts over in the new Congress.
- **Bipartisan goals, partisan vehicles:** support for revitalizing the maritime industry crosses party lines, but the bills that carry it, especially tax bills, depend on which party controls Congress.

- **Money is the missing piece:** authorization is advancing, but stable funding for shipbuilding, the trust fund and the tax incentives is not yet secured.
- **China as the common thread:** national security concerns about China's dominance in shipbuilding and shipping are the strongest argument holding the coalition together.
- **Less time after 2026:** new committee leaders and the approaching 2028 presidential campaign will compress the time available to rebuild any unfinished legislation.

Key Dates to Watch

Date	Event
November 3, 2026	Midterm elections
November 9, 2026	Senate returns; current suspension of China port fees set to expire
November 15, 2026	Current Jones Act waiver set to expire
December 11, 2026	Government funding deadline, competing with the defense bill for floor time
January 3, 2027	New Congress sworn in; unfinished bills must be reintroduced
January 9, 2027	Proposed new end date for the China port fee suspension

About AMIC

The American Maritime Industrial Coalition is an industry coalition that coordinates the U.S. maritime industrial base. It maps shipbuilding and supply-chain capacity, connects projects with partners and capital, and supports implementation. AMIC is nonpartisan and does not take positions on candidates or parties. Membership information: maritimecoalition.us.