



The NSMV 5

OPPOSITE: SUNNY MARITIME COLLEGE CELEBRATES THE KEEL LAYING OF THEIR TRAINING SHIP, NSMV 1, EMPIRE STATE.
 OPPOSITE LOWER: AN ILLUSTRATION FROM MARAD SHOWS ONE VIEW OF THE NSMV SHIPS.
 BELOW: CONSTRUCTION ON THE NEW SHIPS HAS STARTED, IN ORDER TO TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF MARINERS.

Things didn't get much better after Cropper lobbed his request. "You know, that's a really great idea," Cropper recalls a Cummings staffer telling him. "I just don't think it has any chance of ever coming to reality." After Cropper and his team had traveled all the way from California to plead their case, being shut down in a stairwell wasn't quite the outcome they had hoped for.

On March 15, 2022, however, the staffer's gloomy prediction was proven decisively wrong. On that day, President Joe Biden signed into law H.R. 2471, a \$1.5 billion-dollar appropriations bill that included funding for Cal Maritime's very own state-of-the-art National Security Multi-Mission Vessel (NSMV). It would be the fifth NSMV that Congress had agreed to purchase for the academies.

The new ship, known as NSMV 5, will be built by the Philly Shipyard company in Philadelphia at an estimated cost of \$320 million. It's expected to be completed sometime between the summer of 2025 and the summer of 2026. Like the *Golden Bear*, Cal Maritime's current training vessel, this new ship will

be formally owned by the Maritime Administration, an agency of the US Department of Transportation, and leased to the university.

Since its founding in 1929 as the California Nautical School, Cal Maritime—along with its fellow maritime academies—has had to make do with hand-me-down service vessels. While the school has been grateful for the training ships it has received, there's no comparison to having a truly modern ship to train cadets on, says Cropper. "The equivalent I think would be a 40-year-old car—say, an AMC Gremlin. There's no adaptive cruise control. There's no ABS braking." Sure, you figure out how to drive, but you're limited by outdated systems and technology.

Not so when it comes to the NSMV 5. Among its countless new features, it will have a helipad, integrated WiFi and fiber optic cabling, a training bridge, several onboard laboratories, dedicated medical facilities, an auditorium, and autonomous and semi-autonomous systems. For his part, Cropper is most excited about the ship's roll-on/roll-off (RO-RO) capability, which will allow wheeled cargo and

A Ship *for the* Modern Age — by — Adam Rosen



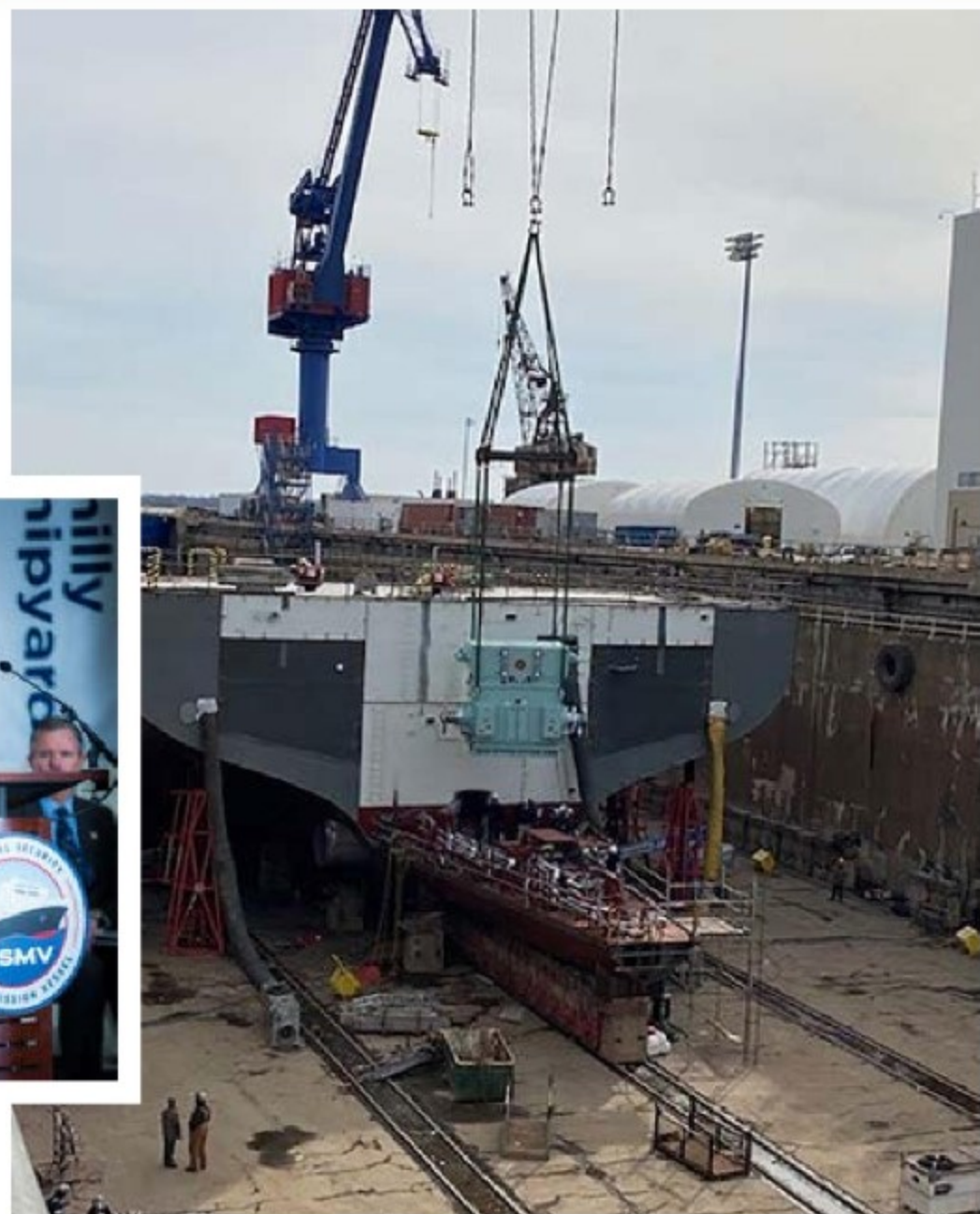
Some eight years ago, Cal Maritime President Thomas Cropper found himself being debriefed in a stairwell at the U.S. Capitol building. He and his staff had come to Washington to meet one-on-one with the late Congressman Elijah Cummings and discuss the prospect of procuring a brand-new training ship for Cal Maritime and four of the country's other state maritime academies. At the last minute, however, the Congressman had to cancel. His staff said they'd still be willing to meet—if they could find a space. The group was informed that the stairwell was free to use.



BELOW: LUCINDA LESSLEY, ACTING MARAD ADMINISTRATOR, AT THE KEEL LAYING EVENT FOR NSMV 1, BOUND FOR SUNY MARITIME



RIGHT: THE CONSTRUCTION OF ONE OF THE NEW TRAINING SHIPS, A WORK IN PROGRESS



vehicles to enter and exit the ship directly. This functionality will be especially useful when the ship is deployed to help after natural disasters, which it's expected to do as part of its leasing agreement with the Maritime Administration. Ambulances and other emergency vehicles will be able to immediately access and leave the ship.

"It's really critical to train the next generation of mariners in more-up-to-date ships," says Franz Lozano, Cal Maritime's Vice President for Administration and Finance and Chief Financial Officer. Being well-versed in the latest ship technology will make cadets seeking industry jobs in the US and around the world that much more prepared.

While the ship itself will be a game changer for Cal Maritime, the symbolism of its funding can't be overstated either, says Cropper. It marks the first time in US history (going all the way back to 1776) that the federal government had agreed to provide brand-new, purpose-built training ships to train future mariners. In Cropper's view, it shows that the government recognizes how important the state maritime academies are to the country.

Lori K. Schroeder, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, believes that having a new NSMV for Cal Maritime to call its own will instill an even stronger sense of pride in current and future cadets. "Whether in dock or underway on such a well-appointed training ship, Cal Maritime cadets cannot help but see that their

chosen professional field is taken seriously by everyone around them and indeed by their own federal government."

It was a long, often discouraging path to get to this point, one filled with days in the stairwell—both metaphorically and, in the case of the Cummings meeting, literally.

Cropper credits widespread backing from different stakeholders in the shipping industry for helping convince members of Congress. He says his efforts were supported by shipbuilders, maritime unions, and "many, many, many, many congressional delegations." Closer to home, Cal Maritime alumni and families, and the California state government and university system, were equally important advocates. And, of course, there was the close collaboration between Cal Maritime staff and their counterparts in the other maritime academies to move the needle.

In conversation, the president never gets tired of pointing out that the backing was bipartisan, from beginning to end. It turns out everyone likes cool new ships.

Although funding for the first NSMVs was approved before the outbreak of COVID-19, Lozano says current events have only bolstered the case for the ships. "COVID certainly has awakened the world and awakened our nation to how important supply chain logistics is now," he says. In separate interviews, both he and Cropper

offered a reminder that 90 percent of the world's goods are moved by ship.

In preparation for the NSMV 5's arrival, Cal Maritime is planning a major upgrade to its pier and waterfront area, estimated to cost \$60 million. Lozano expects much of the funding to come from the state and federal governments. One of the priorities of the Waterfront Master Plan, says Schroeder, is to "provide more access to the water for all of our cadets—for academic, athletic, as well as for recreational purposes."

Additionally, the curriculum will be updated to ensure students are fully prepared for training on the new ship, says Schroeder. This will involve studying ship drawings, getting input from faculty and the administration, and potentially sending an "advance team" to inspect one of the NSMVs that's already been delivered to one of the other state maritime academies.

While excitement about the new ship is palpable around campus and beyond, it's undeniable that the *Golden Bear*, which served generations of cadets, will be deeply missed. Lozano, who keeps a picture of the ship in his office, equates the transition to "saying goodbye to a friend."

"This friend of yours has provided you with so much over the years—training all of these cadets that have awesome careers in the maritime industry and the transportation industry. Of course you're gonna miss them," he says.

The saga came full circle this past December, when Cropper crossed paths with the former Cummings staffer, Lucinda Lessley, now Acting Administrator of the Maritime Administration. They were attending the keel-laying for the first NSMV on the building block, the *Empire State*, to be delivered to SUNY Maritime College. "She turned to me and said, 'I just want you to know, I remember what I said. I'm glad I was wrong.'"

Thousands of Cal Maritime alumni and current cadets surely feel the same way. ↓

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE NSMV SHIPS FROM MARAD.



Watch the full keel laying ceremony for training ship NSMV 1.