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Trump Waives Jones Act For Puerto Rico Amid Hurricane Relief Efforts; Is This In The Island's Best Interest?



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By [Maria G. Valdez](#) Sep 29 2017, 03:00PM EDT



Hurricane survivors receive food and water being given out by volunteers and municipal police as they deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Maria on September 28, 2017 in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico experienced widespread damage including most of the electrical, gas and water grid as well as agriculture after Hurricane Maria, a category 4 hurricane, passed through. Joe Raedle/Getty Images

"At @ricardorossello request, @POTUS has authorized the Jones Act be waived for Puerto Rico. It will go into effect immediately," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders tweeted Thursday morning, saying that President Trump had authorized it after a request from Gov. Ricardo A. Rosselló of Puerto Rico.



The Trump administration has decided to waive a nearly century-old shipping law that many argued was hampering relief efforts in hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico.

The Jones Act, otherwise known as the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, is a maritime law requiring shipments of goods between two U.S. ports to be made with American-flagged vessels, manned by American crews. Signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson two years after the end of World War I, the Jones Act was a [protective measure](#) against foreign competition, particularly Germany. By restricting domestic trade to U.S.-flagged vessels with U.S. crews, America would always have a robust fleet of boats and sailors on hand in the event German submarines attacked the U.S.

However, in this day and age, many find the Jones Act is unnecessary, including Republican Senator John McCain. [McCain's office said](#) the law has had the unintended consequence of making it twice as expensive to ship things from the U.S. mainland to Puerto Rico, as it is to ship from any other foreign port in the world, costing the island \$537 million a year, according to the University of Puerto Rico.

Pressure was mounting on the Trump administration to lift the restrictions regarding supplies being sent to help Puerto Rico recover from Hurricane Maria, which ravaged the U.S. territory more than a week ago.

[According to Vox's Matthew Yglesias](#), "Puerto Rico, in particular, is so close to the United States that the most cost-effective way to transport many goods there would be for ships to stop off en route to a mainland port. But under the Jones Act, foreign-originating goods must be dropped off in Jacksonville and then shipped to Puerto Rico via an exorbitantly expensive Jones-compliant vessel. Likewise, it costs far more to ship US-produced goods to Puerto Rico than it does to Jamaica."

"In the US Virgin Islands, which are exempt from the law, US-made goods are about half as expensive, while the cost of living in Puerto Rico is 13 percent higher than on the American mainland. Food on Puerto Rico costs twice as much as it does in Florida, and that's before the devastation of the island's agriculture by Hurricane Maria."

The administration had come under fire in part because it originally refused to waive the Jones Act for more than a week after Hurricane Maria, even though it had granted similar waivers amid Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. In response,

the Department of Homeland Security said the Jones Act was waived after Hurricanes Harvey and Irma to make up for fuel pipelines that were shut.

They added that Puerto Rico is having no problems getting gasoline, diesel fuel and other supplies to the island, but that the problem is getting those supplies off the ships and distributing them on the island. "We do not lack U.S.-flagged vessel capacity to move commodities to Puerto Rico," Homeland Security said. Cranes powered by generators that are moving at half speed, as well as difficulty moving goods around the island, are the primary problems.

Acting Homeland Security Department Secretary Elaine Duke said Thursday that the temporary waiver will last for 10 days.

"It is intended to ensure we have enough fuel and commodities to support lifesaving efforts, respond to the storm, and restore critical services and critical infrastructure operations in the wake of these devastating storms," Duke said in a statement.

After the 10-day period, the waiver can be extended if needed, Department of Homeland Security spokesman David Lapan [told CNN](#). He said the waiver was approved after it was determined that doing so was in the interest of national defense.

Although a lot of people argue that the U.S. is better off without the Jones Act, was a waiver the best solution during these times of crisis in Puerto Rico? The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations doesn't seem to think so. They're fact checking Fake News about the Jones Act. **Find their arguments below:**

"True or False: The Jones Act was impeding relief efforts to Puerto Rico.

False: Foreign-flag ships with cargo from ports outside the United States have always been allowed entry to Puerto Rico.

True or False: Unions oppose waiving the Jones Act in an emergency so that ships can access Puerto Rico.

False: Maritime labor has never, not once, opposed a waiver of the Jones Act in an emergency when there were not enough ships or mariners to handle the job. We have never let a ship sail shorthanded.

True or False: Waiving the Jones Act is critical to aiding Puerto Rico at this time.

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False: One of the biggest challenges in Puerto Rico is unloading the current cargo ships that are docked as well as the containers at port, not getting more foreign cargo ships.

- **Approximately 9,500 containers of goods were moved by domestic maritime companies to help its residents recover.**
- **In the immediate aftermath, one state-of-the-art large container ship arrived with over 35 million pounds of cargo. This is the equivalent carrying capacity of 1,900 cargo planes.**
- **In anticipation of the island's needs, the domestic American maritime industry stowed approximately 3,000 containers filled with goods in the terminals prior to the hurricane landing.**
- **Jones Act vessels have the capacity to carry more than 4,000 containers per week to Puerto Rico.**

True or False: Waiving the Jones Act would add efficiency to delivery of goods.

False: Because of infrastructure challenges, a Jones Act waiver could hinder, not help, relief efforts. A Jones Act waiver could overwhelm the system. There are logistical bottlenecks as a result of the inability to distribute goods within Puerto Rico due to road blockages, communications disruptions and concerns about equipment shortages, including trucks, chassis and containers.”

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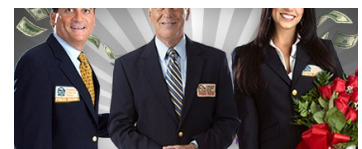
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