

Save Our Ships Act

This legislation would establish the Historic Naval Ship Preservation Grant Program to help fund the preservation of historic U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships and submarines for use in museums and memorials. It would also fund grants for the museum ships to provide educational experiences specifically to inspire the future naval shipbuilding workforce.

Background

Historic naval ships exist in museums, memorials, and parks across 29 states. According to the Historic Naval Ship Association, these ship museums provide educational programs for over half a million youth and support over 2,000 enlistments, retirements, and commissionings every year. Beyond the incalculable value of preserving and sharing U.S. naval heritage, these ship museums contribute \$1 Billion annually to the nation's economy.

These historic naval ships face a growing challenge, however, when it comes to physical preservation and maintenance. Especially for ship museums that sit in water, hull preservation and responding to both routine and emergency structural repair needs can cost millions of dollars and force closure to the public for months or years while the ship is placed in dry dock. The limited rate of new ships being turned into museums makes the preservation of existing museum ships that much more important.

A federal grant program, the Maritime Heritage Preservation Grant Program, has previously provided some funding for historic naval ships to do physical preservation activities. However, the source of funding for this existing program—the sale of obsolete vessels from the National Defense Reserve Fleet to be turned into scrap metal—is highly unstable and split amongst a large number of recipients outside the grant program. It is therefore not a reliable source of assistance for ship museum preservation.

Summary

This legislation would:

- Establish in the Department of the Interior the Historic Naval Ship Preservation Grant Program to provide grants on a competitive basis to nonprofit, state, and local government entities operating historic naval ship museums to:
 - Conduct physical upkeep and repair of the historic military vessels and mitigate environmental hazards or damage to the vessels.
 - Implement education and workforce development programs related to naval careers, including shipbuilding and submarine construction.
- Authorize appropriations for the grant program at \$5 million annually.

This grant program, subject to annual appropriations, would provide a more reliable and dedicated source of support for the preservation of U.S. history and promotion of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard's future workforce.