

The Washington Post

Letter to the Editor

The truth about foreign aid

May 8, 2011

John Norris cited a Cornell University study concluding that requiring 75 percent of U.S. international food aid to be shipped aboard U.S.-flag vessels [American taxpayers millions in unnecessary transportation costs.](#)

The reality is that cargo preference adds no additional cost to foreign aid programs and should be credited with sustaining an essential national defense sealift capability.

Cargo preference does not divert one dollar away from food aid programs. To the extent that cargo preference increases costs, the difference has been reimbursed by the Transportation Department. For example, reimbursements resulted in a \$128 million net increase in available food aid funding in 2006. The Transportation Department reimburses these costs because a reliable U.S.-flag commercial fleet provides essential sealift capacity in times of war or national emergencies.

Approximately 80 percent of war materiel shipped to Afghanistan and Iraq was delivered by commercial U.S.-flag vessels. This capability is available to the U.S. government at a fraction of the cost of using U.S. Navy vessels.

The Defense Department estimates that it would require approximately \$52 billion in capital costs and an additional \$1 billion in annual operating costs to maintain similar capability. Cargo preference is a sealift bargain.

James L. Henry, Washington

The writer is chairman of USA Maritime.