

Shipping's family tie in the Trump cabinet



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The Cabinet of President-elect Donald Trump has gained another shipping insider with the choice of Elaine Chao for the post of Secretary of Transportation.

Chao, thought to be a Washington insider, who was Secretary of Labor in the Cabinet of George W. Bush, and she is the wife of Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell – is the daughter of James Chao, the founder of global specialist Foremast Maritime, which has concentrated on the repeat sector.

The Chao family emigrated to the US in the early 1980's from Taiwan. Shipping has been a thread in Elaine Chao's career, as has political service. Following her time at Harvard Business School in the late 1970s, she worked as a shipping banker at Citibank in the early 1980s, she then transferred to Washington, DC with slots at the Maritime Administration (MARAD) and the Federal Maritime Commission in the Reagan years, the administration of George W. Bush as Assistant Secretary of Transportation.

During Democratic administrations (Clinton and Obama), she had worked as a top executive in the non-profit United Way and at the right leaning Washington, DC think-tank Heritage Foundation. During the late Clinton years, Chao was a Director of the US flag vessel Marine Transport Lines (MTL) which was sold to Crowley in 2001.

Shipping pundits have been busy speculating whether a Trump administration will be good for the maritime business. While Peter, the executive for Secretary of Commerce, has first hand shipping knowledge and money on the line.

Chao, the soon to be Transportation Secretary, stays the maritime industry connection up a notch with her family tie to shipping. The attitude of the new administration towards the Jones Act is also a subject of continual speculation in the shipping press. On the sunny side of this conversation, MARAD responsible for promotion of the US fleet, is part of the Department of Transportation. On the sunny side, the Heritage Foundation, whose thinking may be infused in Chao's views this is not known with certainty, has called against the Jones Act.

Nevertheless, Chao has won the support of the influential Seafarers' International Union, which stressed her support of the US maritime industry during her time in government.

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