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January 31, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As we enter the second year of implementation of your two signature legislative achievements, we write to draw your attention to an endangered symbol of the nation, the *SS United States*. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act were both envisioned to create jobs and revitalize our country's economy. Saving "America's Flagship," the only vessel to bear the name of our great nation, from imminent destruction and aiding in its redevelopment, would embody the success of both of these laws advanced by your administration.

Situated in the historic city of Philadelphia, a city you know well, amidst other iconic symbols such as Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, the *SS United States* stands as a testament to America's values and indomitable spirit. Rising above Pier 82 in South Philadelphia, this ship has become an inspirational beacon of patriotism, appreciated for its incredible history.

Regrettably, this symbol of American post-war innovation, strength, and resilience is now in grave danger. The vessel's landlord, Penn Warehousing, which leases the pier from the Port of Philadelphia, doubled its rent without notice during the coronavirus pandemic in an effort to force the ship from her pier, placing an immense financial strain on our non-profit that owns and cares for the ship. The *SS United States* is now under the imminent threat of eviction and destruction, with a legal battle reaching a critical juncture in the coming weeks.

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This maritime marvel, nearly 1,000 feet long and a hundred feet longer than the RMS *Titanic*, is a global ambassador of post-war leadership and epitomizes "Made in America" - very much in line with your Administration's goals of creating stable domestic jobs and revitalizing our cities and towns. Having smashed the transatlantic speed record on its maiden voyage in 1952 - a record never broken - the SS *United States* went on to carry more than a million passengers, including U.S. presidents, world leaders, servicemembers, and immigrants. The ship was retired from service in 1969 and has been patiently awaiting restoration ever since.

As Philadelphia prepares to celebrate the nation's 250th birthday and host the FIFA World Cup in 2026, the potential loss of the SS *United States* is unthinkable. Now is not the time to let this heralded symbol of the American Century disappear. Indeed, it would be a global embarrassment if the nation's Flagship were to face destruction during this time of grave geopolitical uncertainty abroad.

The ship's connection to Philadelphia runs deep, stemming from the lifelong dream of Philly native William Francis Gibbs, the vessel's designer. An astounding 75 percent of our country's naval vessels deployed during World War II were designed by his firm. With support from the US Department of Defense and the creation of an innovative public-private partnership, the SS *United States* was an engineering marvel in the days before the jet age, even capable of serving as a top-secret troopship if the Cold War turned hot.

Back in 1992, the SS United States Preservation Society secured Congressional support for the "SS United States Preservation Act," legislation designed to protect the ship from destruction. Seven years later, America's Flagship was added to the National Register of Historic Places even though she was less than 50 years of age - because of her "compelling national significance," a status earned by less than one percent of the National Register's more than 90,000 recognized historic properties.

In 2010, the vessel's fate took a positive turn thanks to the generosity of Philadelphia philanthropist and U.S. Navy veteran Gerry Lenfest, ensuring its upkeep and subsequent purchase by the SS United States Conservancy. The Conservancy has built a supporter base from every state in the nation and more than 40 countries to help save the ship and redevelop her.

Recently, a transformative design and financial plan was unveiled, confirming the economic viability of reimagining the SS *United States* as a permanently moored, climate resilient, mixed-use complex. Developed in collaboration with RXR Realty and MCR Hotels, the plan includes a 1,000-key hotel, diverse dining venues, event spaces, green areas, galleries, and a world-class museum.

This project would create thousands of jobs, draw visitors from around the world, and generate millions in annual tax revenue. RXR/MCR's planners have expressed their commitment, offering extensive research, and architectural and engineering studies to help advance the redevelopment. The Conservancy is even willing to donate the ship to the National Park Service, the state of Pennsylvania, or other entities in exchange for a viable pier location.

To date, the Conservancy has never received support or taxpayer funding from either the state of Pennsylvania or the Federal Government. However, the ship is now potentially weeks from meeting a terrible fate, and we urgently need your help. Indeed, several Federal agencies could work with the Conservancy on issues ranging from immediate, short-term government financing, access to pier locations controlled by the government as a temporary or permanent location for the vessel, economic development grants, historic preservation funds, or permitting support.

We also believe that Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, Philadelphia Mayor Chelle Parker, PhilaPort leadership, and other officials have a unique opportunity to realize the enormous economic potential associated with saving this endangered American symbol. Several Philadelphia waterfront areas could serve as fitting locations for the ship's revival.

As we navigate this critical moment, we appeal to you, Mr. President, to lend your support to safeguard America's Flagship, the SS *United States*. The ship's rehabilitation is not just an investment in our nation's history, but it is a commitment to restoring American pride. Neglecting this ship, as the late Walter Cronkite rightly pointed out, would be a "crime against history."

The SS *United States* has waited at its Philadelphia pier long enough. It is now time to save and economically activate this irreplaceable national treasure. Great nations safeguard and celebrate their history. They don't destroy it.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We know you can help save the *United States*. We would be honored to brief you and your team as appropriate. I can be reached directly at [sgibbs@ssusc.org](mailto:sgibbs@ssusc.org) or by phone at 202-285-1082.

Sincerely,



Susan Gibbs  
President

SS United States Conservancy

CC:

The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior

The Honorable Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of Transportation

The Honorable Bob Casey, U.S. Senator

The Honorable John Fetterman, U.S. Senator

The Honorable Dwight Evans, 3<sup>rd</sup> District

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick, 1<sup>st</sup> District

The Honorable Brendan Boyle, 2<sup>nd</sup> District

The Honorable Madeleine Dean, 4<sup>th</sup> District

The Honorable Mary Gay Scanlon, 5<sup>th</sup> District

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy