

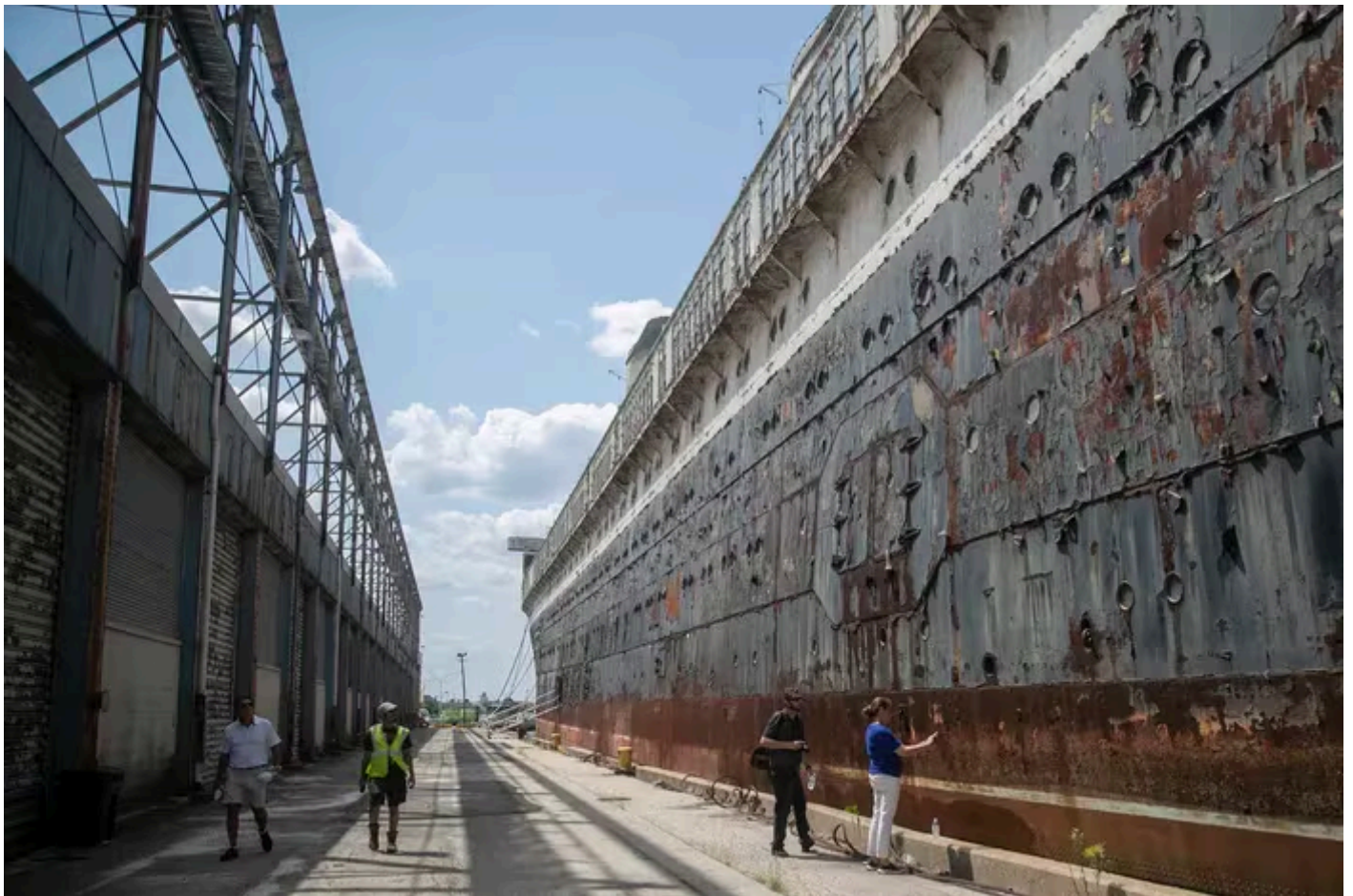


NEWS



Will Joe Biden save the SS United States? Its supporters are making their case.

Caretakers of the SS United States hope to transcend partisan politics and get the president or Congress to champion their ship.



People including Susan Gibbs, whose grandfather, William Francis Gibbs, was the architect and engineer of the SS United States, walk along the ocean liner at Pier 82 in Philadelphia in July 2021.

HEATHER KHALIFA / Staff Photographer

by Ximena Conde

Published Feb. 15, 2024, 5:00 a.m. ET

The caretakers of the SS United States, once known as the Queen of the Seas, have sent out an SOS to the highest office in the land as the vessel faces the threat of eviction.

In addition to President [Joe Biden](#), the SS United States Conservancy has sent a plea for help to the U.S. Secretary of the Navy and members of Congress, describing how the ship is “under the imminent threat of eviction and destruction,” appealing to their patriotism.

“Indeed, it would be a global embarrassment if the nation’s Flagship were to face destruction during this time of grave geopolitical uncertainty abroad,” read the three-page letter.

It’s the latest effort to find the ship a champion to save it from the scrapyard.

ADVERTISEMENT

For decades, redevelopers and what would eventually become the conservancy have struggled to repurpose the 1,000-foot vessel that still holds the transatlantic speed record it broke in 1952. Proposals such as [making the ship into a cruise line](#) or time-share condos fell by the wayside over the years as financing failed to materialize. Still, the conservancy has always argued the ship is a slice of American history and should be repurposed, [saving the ship from destruction](#) on [more than one occasion](#) through fundraising efforts.

Yet the conservancy has [clashed with its landlord](#) Penn Warehousing in recent years, with the dispute playing out in court in January.

The conservancy claims its daily dockage fee was unjustly doubled to \$1,700 in 2021, despite its berthing agreement having stayed the same since 1996. Penn Warehousing’s legal team argued the berthing agreement was left broad at the time because it was unclear when the ship would leave Pier 82, adding the

conservancy had turned into a bad tenant, causing damage to the pier and owing more than \$730,000 in back rent.

Penn Warehousing is asking for what they say is owed to them — the conservancy has continued to pay an \$850 daily dockage fee— and that the ship be evicted.

By the end of the trial, U.S. District Judge Anita B. Brody cautioned both sides against letting her decide the fate of the vessel, [encouraging them to settle](#). In the meantime, Brody has requested additional documentation before making her decision.

Instead, the conservancy told Biden and the Pennsylvania congressional delegation that it was willing to donate the ship to the state, the National Park Service, or another entity in exchange for a new home. According to the conservancy, the federal and state governments control various piers in the region where the SS United States could go, though they didn't specify which.

The conservancy added federal agencies could also help it secure short-term government financing, economic development grants, historic preservation funds, and permitting.

The letter is just the latest effort to find a white knight for the rusting ship. Before the conservancy went to court it tried to make a similar plea to the

governors of New York, Florida, and Pennsylvania, touting what it calls a viable redevelopment plan that would create thousands of jobs and boost tourism for whatever state takes on the struggling tenant.

» **READ MORE: [A hotel, speakeasy, and green space: A detailed list of what could be done with the SS United States. All it needs is a partner.](#)**

“Our cause is bigger than party politics,” conservancy president Susan Gibbs said in a statement. “It’s about demonstrating to the world that our great nation can still unite behind saving one of its most iconic symbols. We’re not looking for a bailout or big check. We need a location for the ship as we advance a viable private sector redevelopment plan.”

According to the conservancy, they’ve made initial contact with some state and federal officials but have not heard back from the White House.

ABOUT US

About The Inquirer
 Diversity & Inclusion
 Advertise
 Contact Us
 Licensing & Permissions
 Photo Reprints
 Newspapers in Education
 Jobs & Internships
 Inquirer Events
 Acel Moore Workshops
 Newsroom Staff
 Help and Feedback

MARKETPLACE

NEWS & INFO

News
 Sports
 Sports Betting
 Entertainment
 Business
 Health
 Food
 Life
 Opinion
 Archives
 Special Reports

E-EDITIONS

[Inquirer Store](#)

[Job Listings](#)

[All Classifieds](#)

[Death Notices](#)

[Legal Notices](#)

[Gift Subscriptions](#)

[The Inquirer](#)

[The Daily News](#)

[Subscriber Services](#)

MOBILE APPS

[Apple iOS](#)

[Google Android](#)



© 2024 The Philadelphia Inquirer, LLC

[Terms of Use](#) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Cancellation Policy](#) / [California Notice](#)

[California residents do not sell my data request](#)