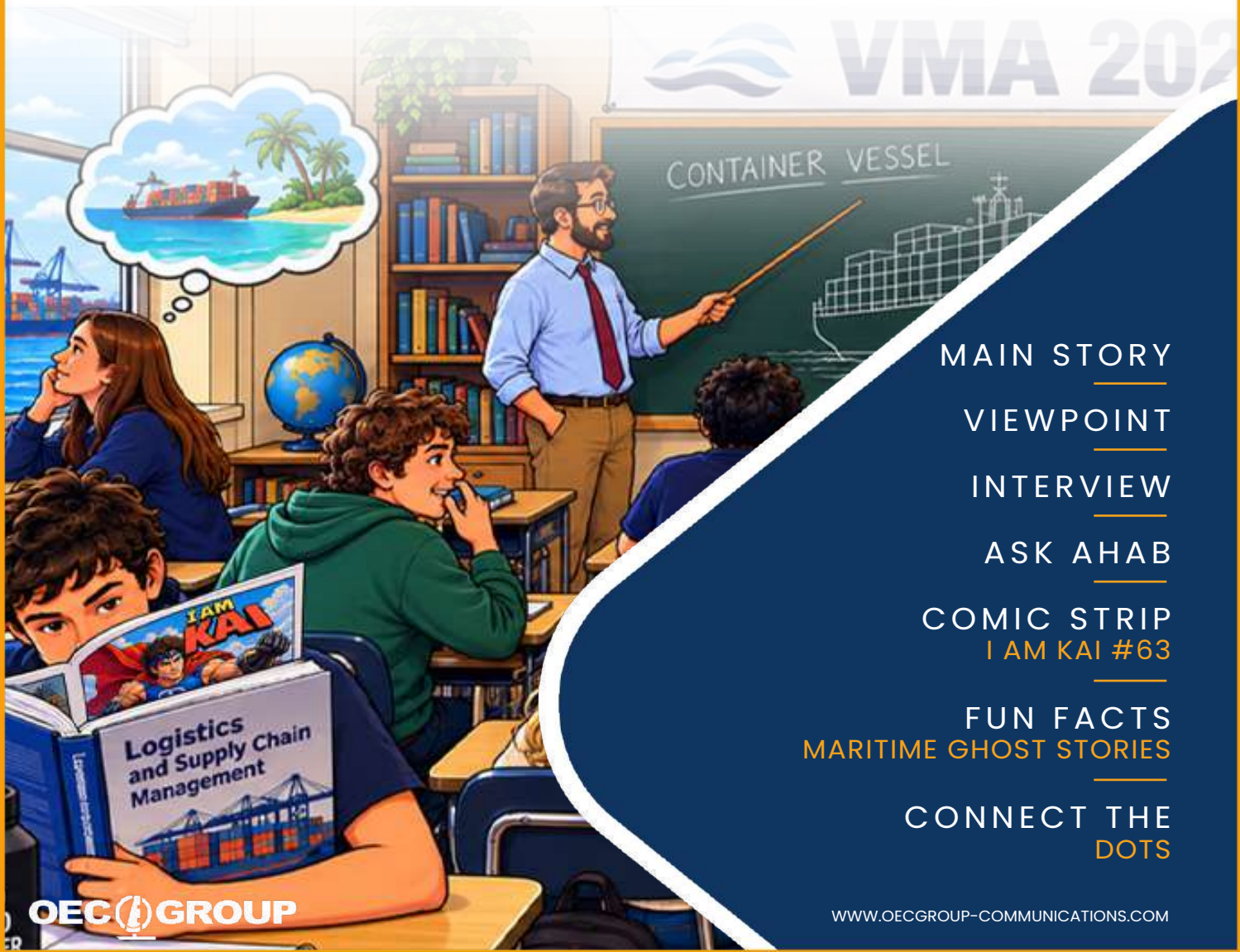
THE SHIPPING STANDARD

OUR EXPERTISE · YOUR ADVANTAGE

OCTOBER 2026

ISSUE 100

VMA 2026: Back To School For Logistics Professionals



MAIN STORY

VIEWPOINT

INTERVIEW

ASK AHAB

COMIC STRIP
I AM KAI #63

FUN FACTS
MARITIME GHOST STORIES

CONNECT THE DOTS

OEC GROUP

WWW.OECGROUP-COMMUNICATIONS.COM



VMA 2026: Back To School For Logistics Professionals

Class was in session at this year's Virginia Maritime Association International Trade Symposium, as shippers had the opportunity to attend more than 20 sessions and speeches covering everything from tariffs and artificial intelligence to geopolitics, the Gemini alliance, and more. Each offered attendees an opportunity to learn more about the issues, trends, and challenges shaping today's supply chain.

Among the most popular sessions were panels examining the industry outlook, cargo theft, and trucking.

One of the most anticipated sessions was also one of the last, featuring carrier leaders Tamekia Flack (World Shipping Council), Natasha Griffin (CMA-CGM), Dan Sheehy (Ocean Network Express), and Nissim Yochai (ZIM).

The panel explored geopolitical conditions, evolving trade policy, service networks, sustainability, and other issues affecting international shipping. Click the link below to hear the entire session.



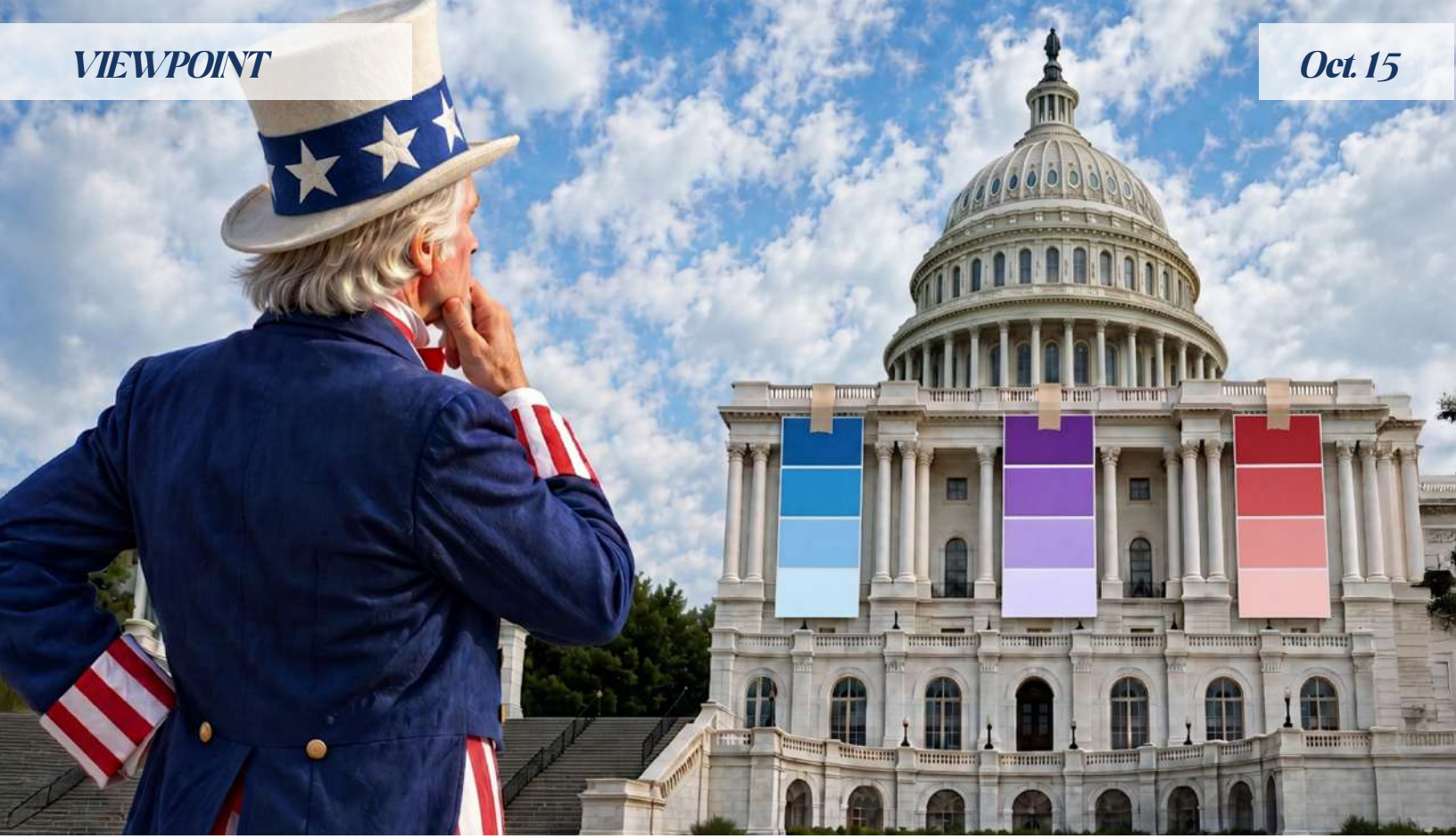
Another well-attended panel focused on cargo theft, a major industry problem that continues to challenge shippers, carriers, insurers, and logistics providers. Panelists Robert Counce (IMC Logistics), Sal Marino (CargoNet), Josephine Palacios (Alliant Insurance Services), and Clay Thrasher (Walmart) discussed why the problem persists and what the industry is doing to combat it. Click the link below to hear what they had to say.



The panel on trucking explored how East Coast drayage providers are adapting to rising diesel and insurance costs, as well as pressure to reduce emissions. Panelists Gary Johnson (Reynolds America), Richard Jung (NFI/ California Cartage Transportation Express), Philip Thomas (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration), Mitch Williams (Amazon Global Logistics), and Philip Wolfe (DCLI) examined the strategies carriers are using to remain profitable and what shippers need to know to navigate the current trucking environment.



For logistics professionals looking to keep pace with a rapidly changing industry, VMA 2026 offered plenty of reasons to head back to the classroom.



THE 2026 U.S. MIDTERM ELECTIONS COULD SHAPE THE NEXT DECADE OF SHIPPING

For the shipping industry, the 2026 U.S. midterm elections matter because they could determine the future direction of tariffs, trade agreements, infrastructure spending, environmental regulations, and supply chain policy for years to come.

Additionally, the upcoming elections have the potential to influence the rules and conditions under which global trade operates.

For example, if Republicans retain control of both the House and Senate, shippers should expect an expansion of the initiatives started by the Trump Administration, including additional tariff actions, stronger domestic manufacturing incentives, and tougher trade enforcement measures.

For importers, this could create at least two more years of volatility as companies continually weigh strategies such as rushing cargo ahead of policy changes and adjusting sourcing strategies. The result would likely be continued fluctuations in demand, capacity, and rates.

Should Democrats gain control of both chambers, the picture becomes more complicated. Congressional oversight of trade policy would likely increase, and efforts could emerge to limit or reshape executive trade authority. Democratic control could result in a more predictable regulatory environment and greater emphasis on infrastructure investment, environmental initiatives, and supply chain resilience programs.

However, if a Democratic Congress and the Trump Administration butt heads on tariffs, it could create significant confusion and uncertainty over policy direction, making it difficult for shippers to plan their sourcing strategies over the next two years.

A split Congress result may ultimately produce the outcome most familiar to the shipping industry – gridlock. While businesses often complain about political stalemate, supply chains frequently prefer predictability over dramatic policy shifts.

A divided Congress would likely make major legislative changes difficult, producing fewer surprises but also fewer opportunities for comprehensive trade reform. In this scenario, executive agencies would continue to play an outsized role in shaping transportation and trade policy.

Long term, however, the election can only do so much. It will not change or stop the broader issues already affecting and reshaping global commerce, such as nearshoring, supply chain diversification, and geopolitical conflicts. These issues are unlikely to disappear regardless of which party controls Congress.

Therefore, the best way for shippers to prepare is not to bet on a particular election result, but to build a supply chain that can succeed under any administration. While flexibility is the ultimate competitive advantage, strategies such as diversifying suppliers, maintaining multiple transportation options, working with trusted logistics partners, and developing contingency plans are critical to ensuring supply chains remain resilient regardless of how the political landscape evolves.

After all, the companies that thrive are not the ones that correctly predict Washington's next move. They are the ones that build supply chains capable of adapting no matter who wins.



DON'T PUT ALL YOUR CARGO IN A SINGLE TRANSPORTATION MODE

Traditionally, many shippers have viewed air freight as either an emergency solution or a service reserved for high-value cargo.
However, that approach no longer aligns with today's volatile logistics environment. With ocean congestion, blank sailings, tariff uncertainty, and rising transportation costs disrupting traditional shipping plans, air freight should be considered an intentional component of both current and future supply chain strategies.

This does not mean shifting every shipment from ocean to air. Rather, it means dedicating, or at least planning for, a portion of cargo to move by air so your supply chain can respond quickly when ocean service becomes too slow or unreliable. In today's unpredictable market, having multiple transportation options is not simply advantageous, it is essential.

The reason is straightforward. Ocean shipping has become increasingly vulnerable to congestion, schedule disruptions, port delays, and blank sailings. At the same time, the widespread front-loading of cargo ahead of potential tariff changes has made securing ocean capacity more difficult. As importers move freight earlier than planned, traditional shipping seasons are being extended, reducing available space and creating new challenges for shippers trying to maintain inventory levels. In some cases, those delays are pushing additional cargo into the air market, placing even greater pressure on available capacity.

That pressure could intensify in the months ahead. An October market report warned that persistent ocean congestion and the release of China-U.S. cargo previously delayed by tariff uncertainty could inject additional volume into the air freight market. Demand tied to artificial intelligence infrastructure, semiconductors, electronics, and year-end retail inventory is also helping keep capacity tight across several trade lanes.

For shippers without an established air freight strategy, the risk is clear, you can no longer assume air capacity will be available whenever you need it. In July, global air cargo demand increased 3.9 percent year over year, while capacity grew only 1.7 percent. That 2.2 percentage-point gap highlights a market where demand is expanding more than twice as fast as available capacity, creating the potential for tighter space and higher rates.

Capacity constraints are only part of the equation. As available space tightens, rising fuel costs have the potential to add even more upward pressure on rates. The International Air Transport Association's global jet-fuel benchmark reached $194.90 per barrel during the week ending September 18, an increase of 7.4 percent in a single week and 116.5 percent from a year earlier.

While fuel costs are climbing across ocean, air, rail, and trucking markets, shippers that delay transportation decisions or fail to establish contingency plans may find themselves facing significantly higher costs when disruptions occur.

Trade policy uncertainty has added another layer of complexity, particularly following the elimination of the de minimis exemption. At the same time, AI-related equipment, technology products, retail merchandise, and other time-sensitive cargo continue to compete for limited air capacity. The result is an air freight market that is becoming increasingly important to a growing number of shippers.

This growing demand reinforces why air freight should be part of a broader supply chain strategy. That means working with a trusted logistics partner to determine which products can remain on the water, which shipments may require expedited air service, and which inventory is best moved through a planned combination of both.

A balanced ocean-and-air strategy is not a cure-all for today's supply chain challenges. However, it does provide something every shipper needs – options. In an era defined by uncertainty, built-in flexibility is far safer than betting your entire supply chain strategy on a single transportation mode.



GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY: TURNING MARKET UNCERTAINTY INTO GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

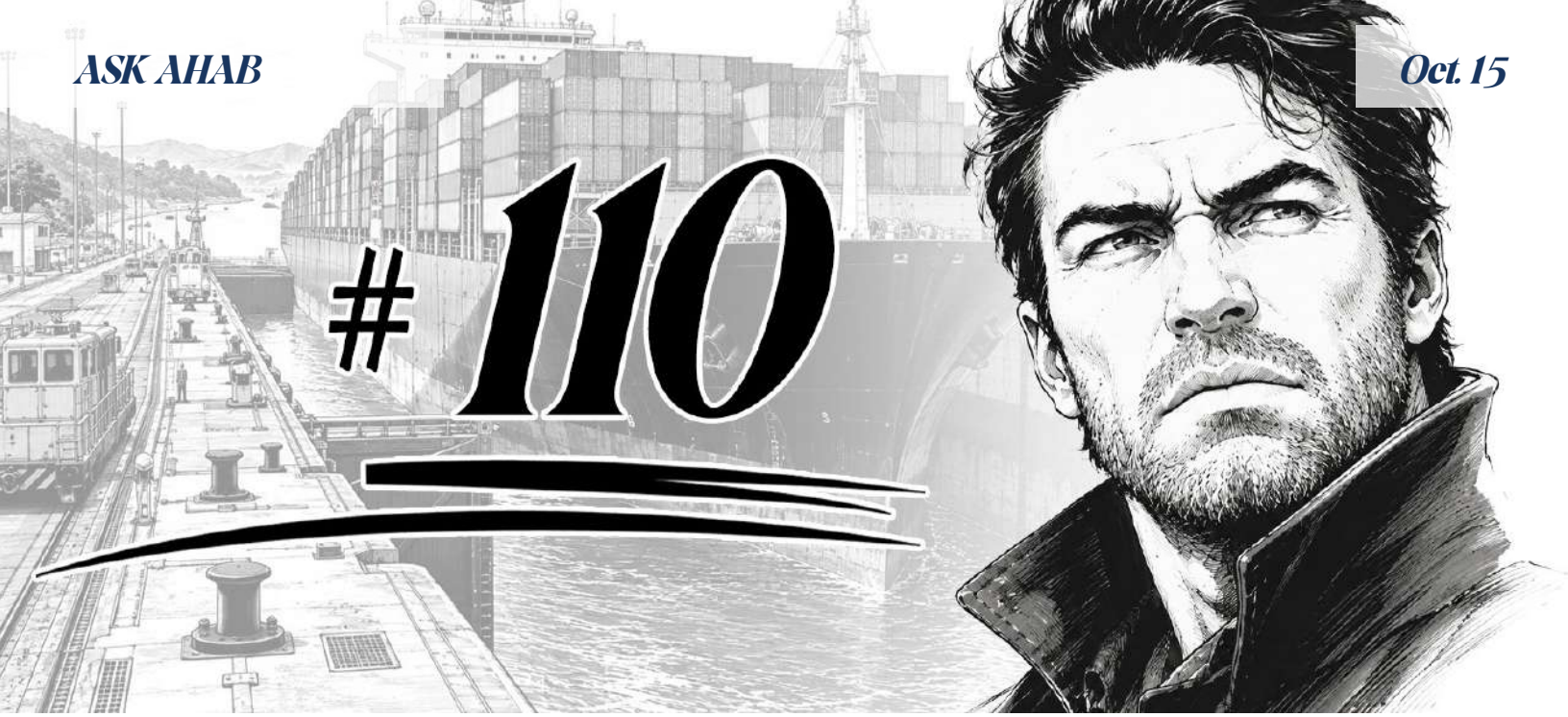
Leaders from the World Trade Center network discuss the growing importance of global trade connectivity and logistics resilience in today's rapidly changing supply chain environment.

John Drew, Chairman of the World Trade Center Association (WTCA), discusses how businesses can navigate evolving supply chains by leveraging foreign trade zones and real-time market intelligence to diversify sourcing strategies, pursue nearshoring opportunities, and accelerate expansion into new international markets.



Scott Center, Board President of World Trade Center Savannah, shares insights on how strategic investment, workforce development, and the global World Trade Center network can help companies navigate an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving trade environment.





ASK AHAB

Dear Ahab:

Is it true that El Nino could make water levels at the Panama Canal worse? If so, what can shippers do to avoid getting caught in another capacity constraints?

– Weather Worrier

Dear Weather Worrier:

Yes. Shippers saw firsthand how weather can disrupt one of the world's most important trade arteries during the Panama Canal drought of 2023, when low water levels forced authorities to reduce daily transits from 38 vessels to just 22. More recently, canal officials have warned that a strengthening El Niño could once again reduce rainfall, lower lake levels, trigger draft restrictions, and potentially lead to further transit reductions.

The good news is that shippers do not have to wait for a crisis before taking action. If another water-level crunch develops, preparation will be the best defense. In other words, if you know weather-related disruptions are a possibility, don't wait for restrictions to be announced.

When capacity tightens, the companies that fare best are usually the ones that planned ahead. That means booking early, maintaining flexibility in routing, and developing contingency plans before canal conditions deteriorate.

Perhaps most importantly, work with a logistics expert who has deep carrier relationships. When disruptions hit, experienced partners can often identify creative alternatives, whether that means securing scarce vessel space, shifting cargo to another service, utilizing different gateways, or developing multimodal solutions that keep freight moving.

The bottom line is that while no one can beat Mother Nature, a logistics expert with the right relationships and experience can help minimize the impact that weather-related disruptions can have on the flow of your cargo.

Dear Ahab:
With the demand for AI data centers continuing to grow, and with those facilities requiring large volumes of glycol for cooling, should ensuring a reliable supply of glycol eventually be considered a national security concern?
– Calm and Coolant

Dear Calm and Coolant:
It may sound surprising, but there is a strong argument that glycol supply deserves more attention as a potential national security issue. Glycol is a critical component in data center cooling systems, as well as in manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation. As AI drives a surge in data center construction, demand for glycol-based cooling solutions is rising right alongside it. Without adequate cooling, data centers can overheat, jeopardizing the systems that store and process the data modern society depends on.

Needless to say, a major supply chain disruption caused by production constraints, transportation bottlenecks, geopolitical tensions, or trade restrictions could affect the availability of a product that plays an increasingly important role in supporting digital infrastructure.

That does not mean a glycol shortage is imminent, but it does highlight the need for supply chain resilience around a commodity that is becoming more critical by the day.

That is why working with a knowledgeable logistics expert experienced in shipping glycol matters. Glycol moves best through specialized supply chains that require expertise, strong carrier relationships, and careful planning. Companies that partner with logistics providers who understand the glycol market and maintain contingency plans are often better positioned to navigate disruptions. In a world that is becoming increasingly dependent on AI and digital infrastructure, moving glycol efficiently may become one of the most important jobs in the supply chain.



ASK AHAB

Dear Ahab:

While everyone seems focused on the U.S. midterm elections, what other races should shippers be watching closely?

– Excited for Elections

Dear Excited for Elections:

One race you should keep a close eye on is California's gubernatorial election. With California's ports handling roughly 38% of U.S. containerized imports and 28% of exports, the outcome could affect supply chains nationwide. For the past eight years, shippers knew what to expect from Governor Gavin Newsom's administration.

Now, with two new candidates offering very different approaches, the direction of California's trade and transportation policies could change. Here is what shippers may be able to expect:

Democrat Xavier Becerra has emphasized infrastructure investment, clean-energy initiatives, and environmental goals. For shippers and ports, that could mean continued modernization and transportation investment, but also additional environmental requirements and potentially higher compliance costs.

Republican Steve Hilton has focused on reducing regulations and business costs. His approach could lower operating burdens for trucking, ports, and logistics providers while shifting priorities away from some environmental initiatives.

Ultimately, the stakes extend far beyond California. The next governor could influence freight costs, port investment, trucking regulations, and how attractive California remains for moving cargo. For shippers, this is not simply a choice between two candidates. It is a choice between two different directions for America's largest trade gateway, and the outcome could help determine where and how U.S. cargo moves for years to come.

Dear Ahab:

Is the East Coast becoming a multi-gateway market? Which ports are competing for New York's market share, and what does that mean for shippers?

– More The Merrier

Dear More the Merrier:

More ports competing for cargo is generally good news. Instead of automatically routing freight through New York/New Jersey, importers can increasingly evaluate Savannah, Norfolk and Charleston based on the final destination of the cargo. For an importer serving the Northeast, New York/New Jersey can still make excellent sense because of its scale and connectivity.

For cargo headed into the Southeast or certain inland markets, Savannah or Norfolk may offer a more attractive overall supply-chain solution. The key is to compare total landed transportation cost, not simply the ocean rate. The growth of alternative gateways also gives shippers something particularly valuable: optionality. A company can establish primary and secondary port routings so that congestion, capacity constraints, weather or another disruption at one gateway doesn't automatically bring its inbound supply chain to a halt.

New York/New Jersey still has enormous scale, but Savannah in particular is becoming too large and too well-invested to be viewed merely as a regional alternative. The competitive pressure should ultimately benefit shippers through more routing choices, greater supply-chain flexibility and stronger negotiating leverage with carriers.

Bottom line: New York isn't going anywhere, but its southern competitors don't need to overtake it to matter. They only need to give carriers and BCOs a credible reason to route the next container somewhere else.

More viable East Coast gateways mean more choices, greater flexibility, and more options when developing routing strategies. Depending on cargo origin, destination, transportation costs, and available capacity, Charleston, Norfolk, or Savannah may sometimes offer shippers a better option, while New York may make more sense for cargo destined for the Northeast. The key is not choosing one port over another but understanding the advantage each port offers over the others.


I CANNOT BELIEVE HOW MANY VESSELS ARE STRANDED IN THE PERSIAN GULF!
BUT IT IS WORTH IT TO KEEP THE GLOBAL ECONOMY STABLE!
THIS IS A LOT OF WORK
WHAT WAS THAT!?!
TIME TO DESTROY THIS THING.
ANOTHER ONE!?!
BOOM!
BOOM!
I GOT IT! THIS SHOULD DEFINITELY GET US AN EMMY!
TELL ME YOU GOT THAT!
OEC TV
KAI. IT'S YOUR EDITOR. I JUST SAW WHAT THAT GUY KAI DID TO THE PROJECTILE AND I WANT YOU TO GET AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH HIM.
DO YOU THINK YOU CAN DO THAT!?!
UH, SURE. SHOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM.
BY THE WAY, KIND OF FUNNY THAT THE TWO OF YOU HAVE THE SAME NAME.
YEAH! QUITE A COINCIDENCE!
OEC GROUP
MEDIA IS A REALLY TOUGH BUSINESS!
THIS SHOULD BE INTERESTING!
REMEMBER, KAI, GET THE INTERVIEW OR LOSE YOUR JOB!

OEC GROUP

Fun Facts About MARITIME GHOST STORIES





Sailors have been telling ghost stories for thousands of years, making maritime hauntings one of the world's oldest storytelling traditions.

One of the most famous Ghost Ships, The Flying Dutchman, is said to be cursed to sail forever and never reach port.





Many sailors believe that seeing a ghost ship is an omen of bad weather or impending disaster.

Ancient Greeks believed that Poseidon would sometimes send spirits from the depths of the sea to punish disrespectful sailors.





Some lighthouse hauntings are believed to be the restless spirits of keepers who died while on duty.

Many sailors have long refused to whistle aboard ship believing it could summon ghostly winds and storms.

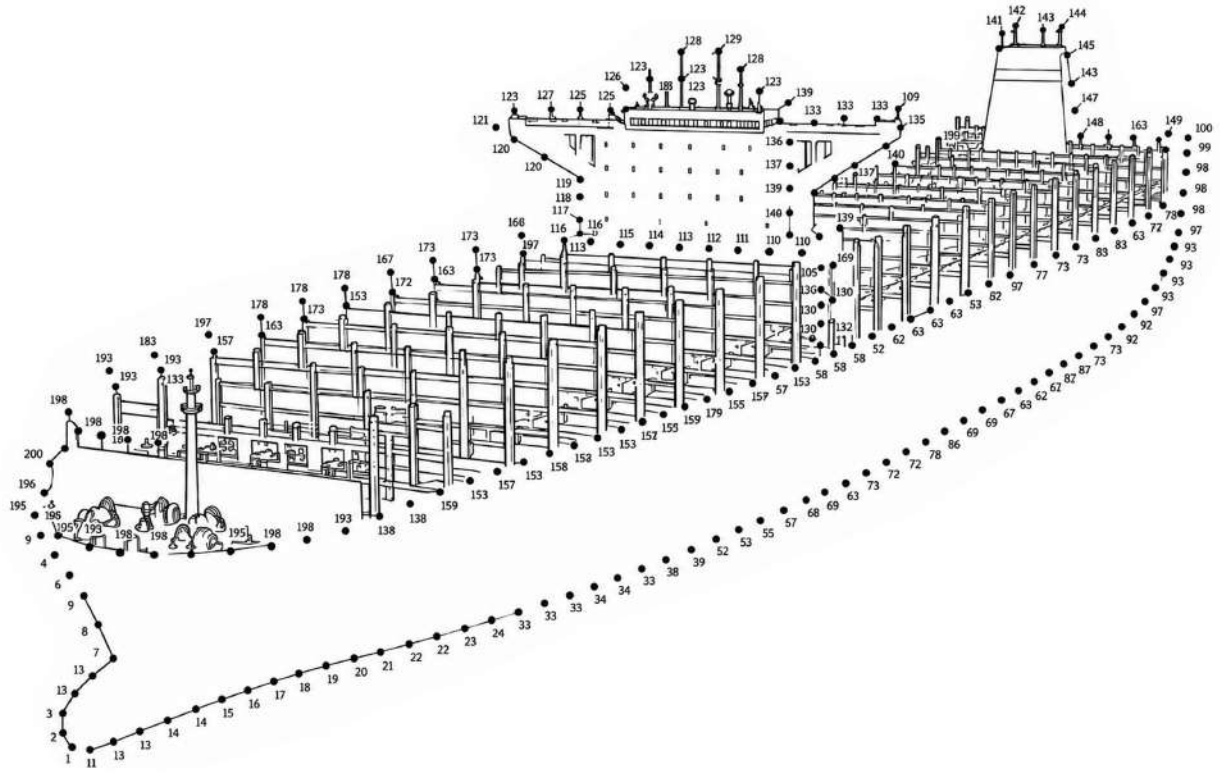




In Scandinavian folklore, Draugr are undead seafarers who haunt coastlines and sunken ships.

In Japanese maritime folklore ghost ships are crewed by the spirits of people lost at sea.

CONNECT THE DOTS



ABOUT

OEC GROUP

As an industry pioneer, OEC Group has become one of the world's leading logistics companies. We leverage in-house expertise, carrier partnerships, connections with ports and transportation hubs, and our network of offices in North America, Europe, Asia, India, South America, Australia, and the Middle East, to provide freight transportation, logistics, information, customs and brokerage, insurance, and technical services to over 50,000 customers of various sizes and industries.

We are also highly sought after for the advice we give shippers on how to optimally manage their supply chains. The guidance we provide is based on data analytics, best practices, and decades of industry knowledge.

We believe that relationships matter and treat your cargo as our own. Our experts are always investing in efficient, cost-effective, and cutting-edge services to evolve with the ever-changing market, address the complexities of any client's supply chain, and consistently perform at the highest level for our customers.

Our business is making our logistics expertise, your competitive advantage.

THE SHIPPING STANDARD

OUR EXPERTISE · YOUR ADVANTAGE

OCTOBER 2026

ISSUE 100

MAIN STORY

INTERVIEW

COMIC STRIP

I AM KAI #63

VIEWPOINT

ASK AHAB

FUN FACTS

MARITIME GHOST STORIES

CONNECT THE DOTS

OEC GROUP