Trump Could Use a 100-Year-Old Law to Lower Gas Prices

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Gas prices are one of the few economic issues that almost everyone pays attention to. When prices spike, people immediately look to Washington for answers. Recently, there has been discussion about using a century-old shipping law to help bring fuel prices down.

That law is called the Jones Act , and it has been shaping how goods move around the United States for more than 100 years.

What the Jones Act Actually Does

The Jones Act governs shipping between U.S. ports . It requires that any cargo moving from one

U.S. port to another must be transported on ships that are:

- Built in the United States
- Owned by U.S. companies
- Crewed mostly by U.S. citizens or residents
- Registered under the U.S. flag

The law was originally passed in 1920 to protect the American maritime industry and ensure the United States maintained a strong domestic shipping fleet for economic and national security reasons.

How This Can Affect Fuel Prices

At first glance, a shipping law might not seem connected to what you pay at the pump. But it actually plays a role in how oil and gasoline move around the country.

Because there are relatively few Jones Act-compliant tankers , moving fuel between U.S. ports can be expensive. In some cases, it can even be cheaper for U.S. companies to import fuel from overseas than ship it domestically.

For example, gasoline refined in Texas may need to be moved to the East Coast. If there aren't enough U.S.-qualified tankers available, supply bottlenecks can occur.

When supply tightens in certain regions, prices can rise.

The Idea Behind Waiving the Law

Presidents have the authority to temporarily waive the Jones Act during emergencies . These waivers have historically been used after major hurricanes when fuel supplies needed to move quickly to affected areas.

The current discussion centers around temporarily suspending the law to allow foreign tankers to move fuel between U.S. ports .

In theory, this could:

- Increase the number of ships available to move oil and gasoline
- Reduce shipping costs
- Ease regional supply shortages
- Put downward pressure on gasoline prices

Would It Actually Lower Prices?

The reality is a bit more complicated.

Waiving the Jones Act does not increase oil production or create new gasoline. What it can do is make it easier and cheaper to move existing fuel supplies around the country.

Because of that, the biggest impact would likely be regional , especially in areas where supply constraints drive up prices.

A Long-Running Debate

The Jones Act has been debated for decades. Supporters argue it protects American jobs, shipbuilding, and national security. Critics say it increases transportation costs and makes domestic shipping less efficient.

Whether the law should be waived, reformed, or left alone is still a hot topic in Washington and across industries that depend on shipping.

The Bottom Line

A temporary waiver of the Jones Act could help move fuel more efficiently within the United States and potentially ease some price pressure. But it’s not a magic switch that instantly lowers gas prices nationwide.

Still, it’s interesting that a policy written more than a century ago is still influencing what we pay at the pump today.

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