

Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Taps New Leadership for U.S. Merchant Marine Academy



Rear Admiral (select) Tony Ceraolo & Dr. Johnathan Gajdos will lead the charge in restoring the Academy's prominence and military readiness

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy today announced Rear Admiral (select) Tony Ceraolo as Superintendent and Dr. Johnathan Gajdos as Provost at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. Both men bring decades of experience in public administration, military leadership and education.

Under the leadership of President Trump and Secretary Duffy, Rear Adm. (sel) Tony Ceraolo and Dr. Gajdos are focused on restoring the Academy to an institution worthy of the sacrifices made by these young patriots and strengthening its academic programs so midshipmen are fully prepared to serve, lead, and defend our great nation.

President Trump's [Executive Order](#) on Restoring America's Maritime Dominance directed a revitalization of the Academy earlier this year. Secretary Duffy swiftly signed a [partnership](#) with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to modernize campus facilities, upgrade simulators and navigation labs, and completely overhaul the IT system. The Secretary also spearheaded the restoration of the [Christ on the Water painting](#). These initiatives aim to ensure the Academy is attracting the best and brightest to serve as our nation's merchant mariners.

“Rear Admiral Tony Ceraolo and Dr. Johnathan Gajdos are precisely the leaders the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy needs at this critical moment—especially after the last administration neglected the Academy and its midshipmen,” said **U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy**. “These men bring the experience, discipline, and vision required to reverse years of decline at the Academy, restore America’s maritime power, and prepare the next generation of American patriots for service to our country.”

“I am honored and excited to serve as the 15th Superintendent of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at a pivotal moment for both the Academy and our nation. With unprecedented focus, support, and momentum behind the maritime sector, this is an exciting time to lead” said **Rear Adm. (sel) Tony Ceraolo, Superintendent at U.S. Merchant Marine Academy**. “I look forward to working alongside our exceptional faculty and staff to educate, mentor and graduate leaders of exemplary character—men and women fully prepared to advance our nation’s national security, economic success, and marine transportation needs.”

“When I had the opportunity for a campus visit during the selection process for this position, I was immediately impressed by the dedicated faculty, the motivated midshipmen, and the skilled staff, fully embracing the Academy’s critical mission,” said **Dr. Johnathan Gajdos, Provost at U.S. Merchant Marine Academy**. “As I assume the role of USMMA’s Provost, I am excited to support the work of our faculty as they educate America’s future merchant mariners and maritime leaders.”

About Rear Adm. (sel) Tony Ceraolo:

Before joining the Academy as Chief of Staff in 2023, Rear Adm. (sel) Ceraolo spent 34 years in the U.S. Coast Guard. Prior to his retirement, he served as the Executive Assistant to the Coast Guard Deputy Commandant for

Operations. Earlier in his career, he served as a Senior Counselor to the Secretary of Homeland Security where he spearheaded and coauthored DHS's first-ever Strategic Approach for Arctic Homeland Security, as well as Director for Maritime Security and Director for Arctic Region Policy on the National Security Council Staff at the White House.

His command experience includes service as Commanding Officer of two Coast Guard cutters, as well as a deployment as Commander of U.S. Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia – the Coast Guard's largest command outside the continental United States; and, as Sector Commander and Captain of the Port for San Francisco and Northern California.

Captain Ceraolo graduated with honors from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. He earned a Master of Public Administration from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, and a Master of Arts with Distinction in National Security and Strategic Studies from the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. He is also a graduate of the Joint Forces Staff College, a designated permanent cutterman, and an Eagle Scout.

About Dr. Johnathan Gajdos:

Prior to joining the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Dr. Gajdos spent more than 15 years in administrative and teaching roles at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), the primary language education and training institution for the U.S. military. Most recently, he served as Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, where he oversaw six schools providing full-time, intensive foreign language training in nine languages.

His prior assignments at DLIFLC include serving as dean of the Persian Farsi School, academic advisor at the Institute's Washington, D.C. office, and teaching team leader and instructor in the German program (earning the DLIFLC Civilian

Instructor of the Year award from the Kiwanis Club of Monterey in 2013). Dr. Gajdos has also taught at Monterey Peninsula College, the University of Iowa, and Technische Universität Dortmund, Germany.

Dr. Gajdos earned a Ph.D. and M.A. in Germanic linguistics from the University of Iowa; a Bachelor's in German from Georgetown University; and a Graduate Certificate in Public Administration from the University of North Dakota. A graduate of the Army Training and Doctrine Command Intermediate Leader Development Program, he has completed Army Management Staff College courses as well as Wharton Online's Leadership and Management Certificate program. He is a two-time recipient of the Army Civilian Service Commendation Medal and in 2025 was awarded the Army Meritorious Civilian Service Medal.

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, located in Kings Point, New York, educates and graduates licensed merchant mariners and leaders of exemplary character who will serve America's marine transportation and defense needs in peace and war. The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy is administered by the Department of Transportation.