

Matthew J. Thomas | Partner
Maritime

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Matthew J. Thomas has more than 30 years of experience in **international trade**, transport and maritime regulation, and government affairs, representing leading energy and commodities companies, shipowners, governments, insurers, investors, ports, shipyards, and marine terminal operators.

Matt works extensively in the areas of **international trade sanctions**, export controls, and related anti-money laundering measures. He has represented several global companies targeted for U.S. sanctions, reaching successful resolutions with the Departments of State and Treasury (“OFAC”). He has aided numerous clients around the world on sanctions and export control compliance planning, investigations, and transactional due diligence, with particular focus on the energy, commodities, maritime, transport, and services sectors.

In addition, Matt has extensive experience in the maritime, logistics, and container shipping sector. He has represented leading carriers, terminals, and logistics providers in regulatory proceedings before the Federal Maritime Commission (“FMC”), where he formerly served as the Assistant General Counsel for International Affairs. He represents marine terminal operators in complex joint venture arrangements and is experienced in global container operators’ merger and integration projects.

He also counsels private companies and foreign governments on matters of international law and diplomatic strategy, particularly in defending national sovereignty or combating international trade barriers. During his government tenure, he was responsible for the FMC’s relations with foreign governments and multilateral bodies, such as the European Union, World Trade Organization, and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Matt works with leading maritime and offshore energy clients on a broad range of compliance issues, including environmental, safety, citizenship, and “Jones Act” coastwise compliance. He has represented leading energy companies in key Jones Act rulings and investigations that have shaped domestic petroleum trade, and structured complex Jones Act compliance ownership structures.

Throughout his career, Matt has built strong relationships with U.S. government officials, trade associations, and the local legal and lobbying community. He guides international businesses in their dealings with the Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, Justice, and Transportation, as well as independent regulatory agencies and Congress. In addition to his professional experience in maritime and international trade, Matt has also served as a federal lobbyist and led successful lobbying efforts on the behalf of local governments, advising on federal affairs and managing relations with congressional offices.

Matt’s broad and diverse Washington career has given him unique skills in legal and regulatory strategy and project management, including the design and execution of hybrid legal and government relations efforts to shape policy and achieve client objectives.

Matt wrote the United States chapter for *Ports and Terminals (3rd Ed.)*, a global compendium of port law that was published in 2018 by Getting The Deal Through.

Select Engagements

International Trade, Energy, and Maritime

- Advised and represented a broad range of clients in connection with U.S. trade sanctions (on Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Sudan, Syria, North Korea, and others), including delisting of Special Designated Nationals (“SDNs”), compliance, money laundering, and related matters.
- Represented container terminals in connection with regulatory proceedings, assessing lease rights, public-private partnerships, and other programs.
- Advised major energy and commodity companies on Jones Act and other regulatory matters, including petroleum export, trade, and blending issues.
- Advised public ports on innovative programs to reduce harmful air emissions.
- Represented and advised foreign governmental entities and agents in connection with sovereign immunity and Vienna Convention diplomatic rights in various matters, including defense of subpoenas and IRS summonses
- Represented global shipping lines in connection with federal regulatory matters, compliance planning and training, lobbying, and responding to investigations, including practice before various federal agencies.
- Advised international lenders and investment funds on the liability, citizenship, regulatory compliance, and vessel documentation aspects of maritime financing transactions.
- Represented a major grain exporter in connection with an agricultural trade dispute in a WTO dispute settlement proceeding.

- Served as the Washington lobbyist for a large California county and other clients.

Government Sector Maritime Experience

- Served as an adviser on maritime and transport matters to the U.S. delegation at the Uruguay Round of WTO negotiations.
- Served as the program lead in investigations and trade disputes between the United States and other countries (including China, Japan, and Brazil) over maritime sector market access and restrictions, and successfully defended agency action before federal appeals court.
- Played a lead role in advising congressional committees and drafting and implementing rulemakings in connection with a deregulation of liner shipping.
- Participated in a month-long staff exchange with the European Commission, learning the fundamentals of EU transport and competition laws and regulations.

Admissions

- District of Columbia

Memberships

- Connecticut Maritime Association
- Maritime Administrative Bar Association

Education

- University of Virginia, BA
- University of Virginia School of Law, JD

Recognitions

- 2024–2025, Admiralty and Maritime Law in Washington, D.C., listed in *Best Lawyers in America*®
- 2016–2024, Transportation: Shipping/Maritime: Regulatory Law, listed in *Chambers USA*
- 2018–2023, listed in *The Legal 500 United States*

Professional Activities

- 2015–present, Propeller Club Port of Washington, D.C., Board Member
- Past President, Maritime Administrative Bar Association