



Home (/) > News > Americas (/news/americas.html) > Wilbur Ross, Paradise Papers, shipping and the Russians

## Wilbur Ross, Paradise Papers, shipping and the Russians



(/media/k2/items/cache/0b9484c9a65fa6f342bb1d4bd477cdc6\_XL.jpg)

It was bound to happen, sooner or later. Exactly a year ago, the day after 2016's Election Day, at the Marine Money Forum in New York, someone asked Wilbur Ross, the keynote speaker whether he might join the Trump administration. Ross, a noted investor and Trump pal around the New York

social scene, had advised Trump on various economic matters previously.

Over the next months, Ross was nominated, and then confirmed by the legislative branch, for the post of Secretary of Commerce.

Everybody in the room in November 2016 - maybe 500 investors, shipping executives and service providers - knew of Ross's involvement in two shipping companies, Diamond S, a private entity, and Navigator Gas, a listed company

The also maybe had an inkling of various other adventures with large bulk carriers - Nautical Bulk Holdings, a play on distressed German assets - and the Transportation Recovery Fund, a tanker owner in partnership with Awilco. So, it is beyond amusing that the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and many other media outlets on both sides of the Atlantic are only now discovering Ross's history in the shipping business, which evolved over many years prior to the 2016 elections.



The central issue is Ross's alleged ties to "Putin cronies", brought to the surface through the medium of the Paradise Papers - a sequel to last year's Panama Papers. The press harped on one of Navigator Gas's charterers, Sibur Energy - not subject to US sanctions enacted after Russia's incursions into the Ukraine, according to Ross - which in turn, is owned by friends and the son-in-law of the Russian President.

The press also took delight at the discovery that Navigator Gas also does business with PDVSA the Venezuelan oil company which is the subject of US financial sanctions. The domicile of Navigator's controlling entities are in the Marshall Islands, and Isle of Man; its executive offices are in London, with a stock listing in the U.S.

Democratic law-makers, the party on the opposite side of the aisle from Trump's Republican party, have stirred up the tempest with a claim, vociferously denied by Ross, that his investment in Navigator was not disclosed to Congress during the confirmation process which occurred earlier this year - he left its Board more than two years earlier, in late 2014. A statement from Ross's office said: "Secretary Ross recuses himself from any matters focused on transoceanic shipping vessels."

Ross did scale back his investments through W R Ross & Co, when he joined the government, but Democrats are delving into the complex structure of offshore holdings of Ross, and other business people who joined the Trump administration, where partnerships may hold investments in individual entities.

An important sidebar to this entire story is the continued disconnect between the "mainstream media" and the shipping industry. At industry conference after conference including those where Wilbur Ross spoke, prior to his new job), attendees have heard about companies too small to be noticed by the public, at large.

Navigator Holdings, with a market capitalization just shy of \$600m, is at the lower end of the "small cap" category. Another angle here is the mainstream media's anti-Trump stance; nevertheless, mainstream stalwarts at CBS and NBC noted that "there is no evidence that Ross broke any laws" or similar words to that effect.

Posted 07 November 2017



Barry Parker (/editor/barry-parker.html)

New York correspondent, Seatrade Maritime

