

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*  
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## **ANNUAL SAIL-IN EDUCATES LAWMAKERS ON CRITICAL MARITIME ISSUES**

U.S.-flag shipping interests came out in force yesterday on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. as the industry conducted its annual Maritime Congressional "Sail-In." A cross-section of maritime industry representatives, including unions, companies and other organizations helped broadcast the importance of U.S. shipping and solicit support for crucial statutes and programs during 127 House and Senate Congressional meetings – on both sides of the aisle.

M.E.B.A. and AMC officials and staffers were spread out among 29 Sail-In groups totaling 122 participants. In cases where the Member of Congress or Senator could not attend a meeting because of a vote or other conflict, a top aide – usually a defense or transportation specialist – would sit in for the lawmaker asking questions and taking copious notes.

Maritime Congressional Sail-Ins help solidify support with lawmakers and remind Congress about the importance of our industry to the economy and national security. M.E.B.A. officials participating yesterday included President Adam Vokac, Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha and Atlantic Coast V.P. Jason Callahan. Several M.E.B.A. staffers including our Government Affairs Director Erick Siahahan also participated. The American Maritime Congress was represented by President Fair Kim and Government Affairs Manager Caitlyn Tierney as well as AMC intern Olivia Mattioni, a recent SUNY graduate and M.E.B.A. applicant.

Lawmakers were informed about the dire need for increased peacetime cargo to help sustain the internationally trading U.S.-flag fleet. They were reminded that their support of the Jones Act, cargo preference laws and the MSP/TSP is crucial. Members are being asked to sign onto a letter pledging funding support for the Maritime Security Program. Lawmakers were also told that the program's value extends beyond the vessels, since under MSP, the Government also has access to the shipping companies' logistics network for the shipment of sensitive cargoes. It has been estimated that it would cost the nation over \$60 billion to replicate the global shipping capabilities made available through its commercial partners in the maritime industry.

Members of Congress were also urged to support cargo generating programs that help keep the U.S. Merchant Marine afloat – including the vital mariner pool – such as Food for Peace cargoes.

Academy training ships, Coast Guard icebreakers, and USMMA modernization were also topics at some of the meetings. At a ceremony last evening, Congressman Rob Wittman (R-VA-1) was honored with the inaugural USA Maritime Leadership Award for his strong and consistent support for U.S.-flag shipping over the years.

As always, you are urged to write a letter or email your Senators and Representatives to ask them to do the right thing for our industry.

### **M.E.B.A. INLAND GROUPS TO MEET AT CMES IN JUNE**

M.E.B.A. has announced a mid-June one-day summit at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School for members representing inland waterways and ferry bargaining units across the country. This Inland Transportation Coalition will consist of representatives of M.E.B.A. members working at various ferry operations, tug and barge outfits, Great Lakes and other inner waterway bargaining units.

The goal of the ITC is to discuss matters of mutual concern and provide education for rank & file M.E.B.A. members involved in contract negotiations, grievance resolution, union administration and maritime education. Conference organizers are reaching out to officials around the country to identify inland members who want to get involved and can represent their bargaining unit at the meeting which will take place on June 14, 2024. Matters of discussion for the Inland group will include contracts and enforcement, political concerns, and other bargaining unit challenges as well as a discussion of strategies to help strengthen their hands.

ITC bargaining units include the Alaska Marine Highway System; Black Ball Ferry Line; Boston Marine Transport; Connolly-Pacific; Delaware Pilots' Association; DRBA (Cape May-Lewes Ferry); Foss Maritime (SoCal); Golden Gate Ferry; King County Water Taxi; Lamont-Doherty; Samson Tug & Barge; Staten Island Ferry; Washington State Ferry; and the Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket Steamship Authority. These groups represent almost one third of the M.E.B.A. membership. M.E.B.A. Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha is heading up the effort and is in contact with the halls to select bargaining unit representation and participation.

### **MARITIME LABOR WARNS AGAINST JONES ACT WAIVERS FOR BALTIMORE BRIDGE WORK**

Maritime labor unions fired off a letter to Maritime Administrator Ann Phillips to air concerns over "premature" calls for Jones Act waivers surrounding efforts to mitigate the Baltimore bridge disaster and reopen the port. The suggestion of waivers was broached in a high-level phone conference with stakeholders held by Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and National Economic Council Director Lael Brainard. Secretary Buttigieg, Customs & Border Protection Commissioner Troy Miller, Office of Management & Budget Director Shalanda Young and Made in America Office Director Livia Shmavonian were cc'd on the letter that was signed by M.E.B.A. AMO, MM&P, SIU, TTD and MTD.

Letter writers cautioned against the hasty invocation of Jones Act waivers, which have been granted unnecessarily in several occasions. They said that any potential waivers of cabotage laws, including the Jones Act, must adhere strictly to existing regulations, with clear parameters and transparent processes. While maritime labor has always supported waivers necessary for national security, it strongly opposes any unwarranted or politically motivated exceptions.

They noted, “we have found over the years that in times of crisis, whether they be natural disasters or man-made disasters, those who oppose America’s cabotage laws begin making demands for waivers and exceptions regardless of necessity or need, as a means of undermining those laws. This crisis has been no different, with those opposed to the Jones Act, the Dredging Act and other cabotage laws coming out with public demands for waivers of those laws, some even before rescue and recovery efforts for the men on the bridge when it collapsed were completed.”

### **TENTATIVE TIMELINE FOR PORT OF BALTIMORE REOPENING**

As the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) continues working with local, state and federal partners to clear the wreckage along the Fort McHenry Channel following the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, engineers have determined a tentative timeline for the restoration of safe navigation in and out of the Port of Baltimore.

USACE expects to open a limited access channel 280 feet wide and 35 feet deep to the Port of Baltimore by the end of April. This channel would support one-way traffic in and out of the Port of Baltimore for barge container service and some roll on/roll off vessels that move vehicles and farm equipment to and from the port. USACE engineers are aiming to reopen the permanent, 700-foot-wide by 50-foot-deep federal navigation channel by the end of May, restoring port access to normal capacity.

USACE commander Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon said, “These are ambitious timelines that may still be impacted by significant adverse weather conditions or changes in the complexity of the wreckage. We are working quickly and safely to clear the channel and restore full service at this port that is so vital to the nation.”

### **FRC TO PERFORM REVIEW NEXT WEEK**

A rank-and-file Financial Review Committee will assemble next week at M.E.B.A. Headquarters following their election at six Union halls during membership meetings. The six-person FRC is a democratic safeguard adopted by the M.E.B.A. in the mid-1990s to examine Union finances from the previous calendar year. The FRC will begin their work on Tuesday, April 16 to spend three days reviewing the Union’s finances from the 2023 calendar year. The FRC is comprised of five members as well as one member who will serve as an alternate. The Committee will consist of the following six members: James Moore (Houston), Scott Adler (NY/NJ), Bryan Higgins (Norfolk), Daniel Barcon-Earle (Oakland), Steve Walker (Seattle) and Cameron Bourque (Tampa). Following the FRC’s review, their completed report will be presented to the membership at next month’s meetings.

The elected Union members will travel to M.E.B.A. Headquarters in Washington D.C. on Monday, April 15. The actual meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 16 in the Conference Room at M.E.B.A. Headquarters. It is anticipated that the business of the FRC will be completed by Thursday, April 18 with travel home the following day.

### **IMB REPORT HIGHLIGHTS RESURGENCE OF SOMALI PIRACY**

The ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) first quarter report released this week highlights concerns about the continued resurgence of maritime piracy off the coast of Somalia. A total of 33

incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships including two hijackings were recorded in the first three months of 2024, an increase from 27 incidents for the same period in 2023.

ICC Secretary General John W.H. Denton said, “The resurgence of Somali pirate activity is worrying, and now more than ever it is crucial to protect trade, safeguard routes, and the safety of seafarers who keep commerce moving. All measures to ensure the uninterrupted free flow of goods throughout international supply chains must be taken.”

Incidents within the Gulf of Guinea waters continue to be at a reduced level. Six incidents were reported in Q1 2024 compared to five in the same period of 2023. The IMB urges continued caution as nine crew were kidnapped from a product tanker on January 1, 2024 around 45nm south of Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea. There has been a noticeable increase in reported low-level opportunistic crimes in Bangladeshi waters in 2024 with seven reported incidents received – six from vessels at anchorage in Chattogram (Chittagong) – compared to one report for the whole of 2023. The Singapore Straits recorded five incidents against four large bulk carriers and a general cargo vessel, considered low-level opportunistic incidents. But the threat for crew safety remains high as five crew were taken hostage in three separate incidents in January.

#### **CLIA REPORT DOCUMENTS RECORD YEAR FOR CRUISE SHIPPING**

The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) has unveiled its 2024 State of the Cruise Industry report, showcasing impressive growth and sustainability initiatives within the cruise sector. The report, which delves into the industry's performance in 2023, highlights a record-breaking 31.7 million passengers - a remarkable 7% increase from pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

Notably, the report underscores the enduring appeal of cruise vacations, with an overwhelming 82% of respondents expressing intent to cruise. This sustained demand is driving significant expansion, as evidenced by a projected 10% increase in cruise capacity from 2024 to 2028.

#### **4th ANNUAL CALHOON DISC GOLF TOURNAMENT THIS WEEKEND**

The M.E.B.A. Merchant Marine Memorial Foundation (4MF) will host its fourth annual Jesse Calhoon Memorial Disc (Frisbee) Golf Tournament this Sunday (April 14) at the Calhoon M.E.B.A. Engineering School. Everyone is invited. The tournament benefits the Memorial Park at the CMES. As you know, the Memorial was created to honor fallen seafarers who have delivered the goods and answered the call of this country since 1775. The Foundation supporting the Memorial is a section 501(c)(3) entity under Internal Revenue Service rules, so all donations are tax deductible.

There is a \$25 entry fee to participate in the tournament which will begin at 1300. You can just show up and play without advance notice, but if you need further information, contact 4MF Chairman Bill Van Loo at (443) 676-6248 or [bvanloo@bvlworks.org](mailto:bvanloo@bvlworks.org)

#### **PATRIOTS' DAY; TITANIC COMMEMORATION**

The M.E.B.A. Union hall in Boston will be closed on Monday, April 15 for Patriots' Day. Patriots' Day is a state holiday in Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut and North Dakota. It is observed on the third Monday in April in those states and commemorates the Revolutionary War battles of Lexington, Concord and Menotomy. The Boston Marathon takes place every year on Patriots' Day. It will be celebrated by Florida and Wisconsin on April 19. The observance should not be confused

with Patriot Day, which is held on September 11 in remembrance of the terrorist attacks in 2001. All other M.E.B.A. offices and halls will be open during their normal operating hours on Monday.

April 15 commemorates another historic day in history – the sinking of the RMS TITANIC. Over the course of the night from April 14-15, 1912, the TITANIC struck an iceberg and sank into the freezing depths of the Atlantic Ocean. Over 1500 people lost their lives on her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York, causing the incident to become the one of the biggest and deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in history. The TITANIC was one of three Olympic class ocean liners built for and operated by the White Star Line. She was one of the largest ships sailing at that time. The company boosted her as being “designed to be unsinkable.” A claim that proved deadly as the vessel only had enough lifeboats to carry about half of her passengers.

Almost 700 crewmembers lost their lives that night, including all 25 engineers. While the tragedy of the sinking was immense, it spurred drastic changes and improvement to regulations in the maritime industry, including the 1914 creation of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS).

April 15 also marks the 159<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Abraham Lincoln, shot by Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth the night before at Washington D.C.’s Ford’s Theatre during a performance of *Our American Cousin*. The National Park Service will do a ceremonial wreath-laying on that day at 7:22 a.m. (the hour Lincoln died) at the Peterson House where Lincoln passed away, across the street from the theater.

About the same time that Booth wielded his derringer in the Presidential box, his fellow conspirator Lewis Powell burst into the house of Lincoln’s Secretary of State William Seward and stabbed him multiple times. Seward had been recovering from a carriage accident and was wearing a metal surgical collar for the injury which reportedly saved his life in the attack. Seward would recover and continue serving in the cabinet of the Andrew Johnson administration. He famously engineered the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 for \$7 million (2 cents an acre) that was initially mocked by some as “Seward’s Folly.”

**NEXT MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS** *(All times are local)*

Monday, May 6 – **Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

Tuesday, May 7 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230.**

Wednesday, May 8 – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org)**

Thursday, May 9 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

Friday, May 10 – **Honolulu@1100**

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