

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*  
**M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES**  
*The Official Union Newsletter – "The Word to the Wise"*  
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## **FULL POWER! JENNINGS ANNOINTED AS CMES DIRECTOR**

Bryan Jennings, who has consistently proven his high academic standards and dedication to our membership, has been tapped by the M.E.B.A. Trustees to lead the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School into the future, the 9<sup>th</sup> CMES Director since the School opened its doors in 1966.

Bryan made his bones with the School as an Instructor beginning in 2004, focusing on Welding, Machine Shop and MSC courses. Steady, knowledgeable and decisive, he eventually became the School's Academic Manager, then Deputy Director. After former Director Chuck Eser retired last year, Bryan took over the position in an "interim" capacity. Since that time, Bryan has continued to demonstrate his steady leadership, effectiveness and vision for the future leaving no doubt to the Trustees that he is the man for the job. Congratulations Bryan!

## **M.E.B.A. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

Ann Gilchrist, who has served as M.E.B.A.'s Plans Administrator since June of 2015 is moving on, after steadily guiding our Benefit Plans for eight years including the difficult COVID era. The M.E.B.A. Trustees expressed their appreciation to Ann for her years of dedicated service and tireless efforts on behalf of the membership. She will continue working at Plans for now as an Adviser and to help transition her successor, as needed.

The Trustees have asked Patty Kelly to assume the role of Plans Administrator. She has accepted and began serving as Administrator immediately.

Patty Kelly has been with M.E.B.A. Plans since the early 1980s when she joined as a teenager. She has served as Benefits Administration Manager since 2013. Her father was member Frank Murphy who sailed with the Union for years as a Chief Engineer and was a former Baltimore Branch Agent. Patty is eminently qualified for the position and is excited to continue to fortify our Plans and serve the membership.

## **FRC COMPLETES REVIEW, FORWARDS REPORT**

A six-person rank-and-file Financial Review Committee spent three days at M.E.B.A. Headquarters this week scrutinizing the Union's financial records for calendar year 2022. The FRC was created as

a Democratic safeguard adopted by the M.E.B.A. in the mid-1990s to examine the Union's finances from the previous year.

This year, the Committee was made up of the following six members: Raymond Collector (Houston) who served as Chairman, Chris DeFonce (NY/NJ), Michael Ferrino (Tampa), Timothy Cogan (Oakland) and Steven Walker (Seattle). The Committee member elected in Norfolk could not attend because of a shipping assignment. Member Kenny Smith, who was elected as the NY Alternate, filled in for the Norfolk member and served as the Alternate for the Committee.

The FRC members signed off on a report that will be made available at the halls and voted upon by members at the regular May membership meetings. Many thanks for their hard work this week and for participating in this important democratic process.

### **UNIONS LOOKING FOR U.S. PRESENCE IN EMERGING OFFSHORE WIND INDUSTRY**

M.E.B.A. as well as other unions and U.S.-flag shipping interests are keeping Congress focused on the need to stress an American presence in the emerging offshore wind industry.

The House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee has been deliberating over the Coast Guard Reauthorization bill this week and the M.E.B.A. and others are reminding Members to ensure that American workers don't lose out to our foreign counterparts as the framework of the burgeoning wind industry is developed.

Committee members approved the Coast Guard bill this week along with an M.E.B.A.-backed provision requiring mariners serving on foreign-flagged vessels on the Outer Continental Shelf to be either U.S. citizens or citizens of the nation where the vessel is flagged. Current law requires that all vessels, rigs, platforms, or other offshore structures be manned by U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents, but foreign companies are exploiting the laws, as written, to use low-wage foreign mariners for this work and allowing them to skirt U.S. taxes and labor laws.

A joint letter recently sent to the Committee by the M.E.B.A., MM&P and Transportation Trades Department (AFL-CIO) notes that if Congress fails to act on this issue, "we run the risk of leaving our nation's renewable energy infrastructure vulnerable to foreign adversaries operating in U.S. waters."

Last year, the provision passed in the House but the Congressional allies of the oil and gas industry helped doom the measure in the Senate.

Opponents say that Americans don't have the workforce or fleet requirements needed for this up and coming industry and therefore would cripple its development. The M.E.B.A./MM&P, TTD letter notes, "While we recognize the capacity of U.S. mariners and vessels does not currently exist to meet the long-term demands of the offshore wind industry, we remain concerned these gaps are currently being exploited to hire foreign labor under existing "flags of convenience" vessel operators for extremely low wages and poor working conditions." They asked Congress to pass the provision which will help reduce this insipid industry trend. That would allow American workers to get in on the ground floor of offshore wind efforts so that the U.S. can begin ramping up its workforce to be players in this lucrative new industry.

## **M.E.B.A.'S VOKAC, INTERLAKE'S BARKER HONORED WITH "FRIEND OF SEAFARERS" AWARDS**

M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac was honored with the Seafarers International House (SIH) "Outstanding Friend of Seafarers" award last week in New York City which he accepted on behalf of the M.E.B.A. and our hardworking members. Interlake Steamship Company President Mark Barker was also a worthy recipient of the honor as was Global Container Terminals USA President John Atkins. The award is bestowed upon individuals who have made advances on behalf of the maritime community and who are dedicated to the welfare of seafarers. The SIH, celebrating their 150<sup>th</sup> year, is a charitable organization that provides seafarers and travelers with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance and advocacy.

In his remarks, President Vokac discussed some of the issues the industry faces after COVID restrictions dampened the quality of life for seafarers leading to an exodus of mariners and sparking new recruitment and retention challenges. "For all the committees out there currently looking at ways to solve the mariner shortage," he said, "it's not complicated – make the jobs desirable again, and people will come."

He discussed the Union's perennial push to improve the lives of our members, by increasing their pay, safety and benefits. He mentioned his appreciation of his fellow honoree Mark Barker, who heads up a company that "gets it." President Vokac said that Interlake's Barker "understands and embraces the fact his company is literally driven by the mariners themselves. Mark, I applaud your commitment to seafarers and look forward to our continued partnership."

## **CONGRESSMAN STRESSES CARGO PREFERENCE IMPORTANCE AT USAID HEARING**

An interesting exchange at a House Subcommittee hearing this week highlighted concerns that some Congressional Members have with the Government's sometimes less-than-strict adherence to cargo preference statutes. Existing requirements stipulate that U.S.-flag vessels must be utilized for at least 50% of Government-impelled cargoes and 100% of military shipments.

Congressman Jerry Carl (R-AL) delighted U.S.-flag interests during a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) budget request hearing when he questioned AID Administrator Samantha Power on U.S.-flag Food Aid carriage.

Rep. Carl, serving in his second term, opened his questioning of the Administrator with the admission that that his father's lifetime service as a mariner, including through World War II, has made the U.S. Merchant Marine dear to his heart. He called the U.S.-flag fleet "critical to our nation's national security" and questioned Powers about her agency's adherence to cargo preference requirements. The U.S.-flag shipping community has raised concerns that USAID has unnecessarily bypassed such requirements in the past. Rep. Carl prefaced his questions by stating that he believes "it's important we make sure that the U.S. fleet remains healthy, so they are ready when we call on in an emergency or in war times...USAID's cargo is not only critical to the community around the world, but also keeps the U.S.-flag fleet ready."

Power launched into a non-committal answer that also stressed her agency's willingness to provide food aid through direct cash assistance - which has the effect of diminishing the amount of food aid

cargo carried by the U.S. Merchant Marine and decreases the overall amount of funding available to purchase commodities from U.S. farmers.

Rep. Carl seemed to acknowledge that he didn't receive a clear enough answer from the Administrator but closed his questioning down by announcing, "I'd also like to take just a moment to thank all of our Merchant Marines for all they do and the hard work of getting goods from "here" to wherever "there" is, in a timely manner."

### **BUD SHUSTER, FORMER T&I CHAIR DRIVES OFF INTO THE SUNSET**

Former Congressman Bud Shuster, who was an effective Chairman of the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee from 1995-2001, died last week at the age of 91. Although most renowned for his dedication to modernizing the nation's highways and aviation systems, Shuster, supported by M.E.B.A.'s Political Action Fund, was an effective advocate for the U.S. maritime industry and succeeded in championing multiple initiatives and key funding benefiting U.S. shipping. He served in Congress for 28 years.

The T&I Committee paid tribute to Shuster this week saying, "Chairman Shuster was a force, and our Nation's highways, aviation system, ports and waterways, rail network, water systems, and more all benefited from his ability to bring together Members of Congress from across the political spectrum in support of infrastructure."

### **CAA REUNION, ITEM DONATIONS FOR 4MF**

Besides the 2023 CAA Reunion (taking place at the CMES from June 16-18), there will be a Silent Auction and Frisbee Golf Tournament on Wednesday, June 14 leading up to the Reunion. These Fundraisers benefit the M.E.B.A. Merchant Marine Memorial Foundation and the upkeep of the Memorial Garden. Donations of items for the Auction (they don't have to be nautical items) or a monetary contribution are greatly appreciated. The 4MF is a 501(c)(3) entity under IRS rules, so all donations are tax deductible. For further info, contact 4MF Chairman Bill Van Loo at (443) 676-6248 or [bvanloo@bvlworks.org](mailto:bvanloo@bvlworks.org)

### **MMC DELAYS – MARINERS CAN CHECK STATUS ONLINE**

An increase in application volume and ongoing technical difficulties with the credential production equipment at the National Maritime Center (NMC) have caused concerning delays with the issuance of Merchant Mariner Credentials (MMC). These technical issues do not affect the processing of mariner medical certificates or endorsements, only applications for MMCs.

As detailed in Marine Safety Information Bulletin 06-23 issued this week, a verification process is available to assist mariners in the interim. For mariners who will be serving on domestic voyages only, the mariner, marine employer, and Coast Guard may use the MMC application verification process to determine whether they have met the requirements to be issued an MMC with a specific endorsement. The authority of their MMC may be verified using a credential verification process. For MMC verification for any international voyages, contact NMC directly for priority printing of your MMC. Mariners may contact their Customer Service Center via Live Chat or by calling 1-888-IASKNMC (427-5662) for assistance. Please refer to the full MSIB which is available on the M.E.B.A. website in the "Documents & Member Notices" section.

## **CANTWELL ON TAP FOR SALUTE TO CONGRESS AWARD**

The International Propeller Club of the United States will honor Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, at the annual Salute to Congress event on June 13, 2023. The award has been presented to Members of Congress who have demonstrated a keen awareness of the importance of all segments of the maritime industry to the economic, homeland and U.S. national security.

Int'l Prop Club President James Patti said, "During her time in the Senate, Sen. Cantwell has been a forceful and outspoken advocate for all segments of the maritime industry. Throughout her career, she has played a key role in the enactment of numerous maritime legislative initiatives and has worked tirelessly to ensure that the programs and policies important to our industry, including the Jones Act, the Maritime Security Program, and the U.S.-flag cargo preference shipping requirements, are funded, implemented and enforced. Senator Cantwell has been – and continues to be – a vigorous and persistent fighter on behalf of the maritime industry and has worked tirelessly on behalf of America's maritime workforce to ensure that all those who work in our industry have a safe and respectful workplace environment," Patti stated.

## **WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY**

Tomorrow (April 28) is Workers' Memorial Day, a day to honor workers who have died on the job, and to recommit to the fight for safe and healthful workplaces. Every year, work-related injuries claim the lives of approximately 5,000 Americans – and a much larger number fall victim of occupational diseases after extended workplace exposures to hazardous substances. Together on this Workers' Memorial Day, we raise our collective voices to win stronger safety and health protections in our workplaces and stronger job safety and health laws. We hold employers accountable to keep workers safe. We demand action on critical safety and health protections against preventable workplace hazards: heat illness, workplace violence, infectious diseases, silica in mining and toxic chemical exposures. We demand more resources from Congress for our nation's job safety agencies to hold employers accountable. We demand dignity at work.

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

Monday, May 8 – **Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

Tuesday, May 9 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230.**

Wednesday, May 10 – **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 11 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

Friday, May 12 – **Honolulu@1100.**

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***M.E.B.A. does not tolerate assault, or harassment of any kind.  
If you see something, say something – The M.E.B.A. Emergency Hotline  
can be reached at 1-888-519-0018.***