



A Message From President Don Keefe

The past two months have been an unsettling time for merchant mariners in the US Flag Fleet. At the outset, I must express my relief that the most immediate threat to our members and their families has passed. Although there are many demands inherent in a mariner's life and many sacrifices made by their families, the crime of piracy must not remain one of them. The piracy problem needs to be solved. It is the most serious and imminent threat facing our membership, our union, and our profession. I remain committed to keeping this a core interest in working with other maritime unions, companies, and the federal government to protect our members against piracy.

During the past few weeks, I have met with senior maritime industry officials and admirals in the Coast Guard, Navy, and Department of Defense to discuss the most effective protection the US government can provide to our globally situated membership. Military and regulatory agencies must implement a satisfactory plan with sufficient haste or seek a legislative solution requiring the Department of Defense to protect American citizens abroad. The M.E.B.A. has already testified at Congressional and Executive hearings and will continue to position piracy as the focus of maritime issues in D.C. However, the vast geographic area prowled by pirates cannot be effectively policed by our government alone. The eradication of the pirate threat requires our government to work closely and effectively with America's trusted and reliable allies. I will continue to pressure decision makers in the armed forces to put the safety of our nation's merchant mariners, the fourth arm of defense, before petty disputes about territory and jurisdiction.

By protecting M.E.B.A. members, companies will be safeguarding their most valuable asset – highly skilled US merchant mariners – the most important factor in their long term strategy to maintain a productive and competitive US Flag Fleet. The skill of the M.E.B.A. engineer and deck officer is at the center of every contracted company's competitive advantage; protecting the health and welfare of every M.E.B.A. member will remain the center of all of my efforts. This will require the Union, our companies, and our membership to maintain an open mind. Policies that made sense in another era will need to be revisited and only through creative implementation

of all available tools can we find optimal solutions to all challenges our Union and our members face.

Although the prevalence of piracy threats and anti-piracy efforts has demanded a large portion of my time, rest assured that the steady process of strengthening the M.E.B.A. continues. Recently, the FRC concluded its review of the Union's finances. Their report highlights the progress we continue to make towards fiscal responsibility. In a recent letter to the membership, I noted that, if necessary, I would support a dues increase. Thankfully, because of cost cutting measures, a dues increase will not be required for the foreseeable future. However, the M.E.B.A. is not yet totally out of the financial woods; I pledge to continue with my financial reforms and look forward to an FRC in the near future which proclaims a growing surplus in the M.E.B.A. treasury.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that the M.E.B.A. has contracted two new ships—the APL JAPAN and the APL AGATE. Obtaining this new tonnage was a significant victory for the M.E.B.A. and the US Fleet because these two ships do not participate in the Maritime Security Program. The vessels will operate solely on their ability to generate revenues; I am confident the M.E.B.A. will operate the JAPAN and AGATE efficiently and effectively ensuring their profitable future.

Today, M.E.B.A. members sail in a new era. Yet danger on the job is nothing new for the US Merchant Marine. The M.E.B.A. faced German U-Boats in two world wars. More recently, the M.E.B.A. transported supplies for US soldiers fighting in the war zones of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Someday soon, the ocean will once again be the exclusive domain of the hardworking mariner. Just as we overcame past dangers, so too will we continue to meet challenges presented during our time with unity, pride and professionalism.

[In Unity and Friendship,](#)

Don Keefe