

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"



M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

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In this issue//Alaska Legislature Increases Ferry Budget//Florida Lawmakers Onboard with Foreign Cruise Company Bail-Out//Letter to Trump Urges Him Not to Waive the Jones Act//CMES Fall Schedule Revision//MSC Hospital Ships Begin Taking Patients//NMC Conducting Business Electronically//AFL-CIO Says More Needs to Be Done to Protect Workers//ITF, ILO Call for Steps to Protect Seafarers//Website Catalogs Port & Crew Restrictions//Saturday is Jesse Calhoun Day//

ALASKA LEGISLATURE SLIGHTLY INCREASES FERRY BUDGET

Alaska's Legislature has okayed a \$20 million bump to the Alaska Marine Highway System budget that could help restore a modicum of ferry service for isolated state residents. The \$66.7 million appropriation is up from last year's \$46 million that shelved all but two vessels in the fleet and kept thousands of Alaskan families stranded at home, even before the onset of Coronavirus. The ferry fleet has served as a crucial connector for Alaskan communities spread out over 3,100 miles.

Alaska State Senator Bert Stedman (R-Sitka) said there is no appetite for a repeat of last year's absence of ferry activity that he called, "totally unacceptable" and noted that the additional money was sought "so we don't face again what we faced this winter, which was no service at all."

Money is also provided in the Legislature's budget for the repair of the laid-up vessel M/V AURORA. Funding was also earmarked for the creation of new crew quarters aboard either the TAZLINA or the HUBBARD to allow one of those vessels to extend its range of operations. The Governor had proposed \$49.9 million in funding for the AMHS this year. He still has the option to veto the Legislature's budget numbers.

CRUISE SHIP COMPANIES SEEKING BAIL-OUT

Efforts by the flag-of-convenience cruise ship industry to receive bail-out money in the recently enacted stimulus bill fell flat, but they are angling for another attempt aided by Florida lawmakers.

There is only one large U.S.-flag cruise ship in operation – NCL's PRIDE OF AMERICA, the rest are largely registered under flags of convenience to shield themselves from paying U.S. taxes while skirting U.S. labor and environmental regulations.

Cruise ship companies are setting their sights on the next Congressional stimulus package. 15 lawmakers from the Florida delegation, representing both Republicans and Democrats, signed onto a letter sent to Senate and House leadership, asking for assistance to their industry that has been devastated by the pandemic. "...We urge you to provide the same level of support to the workers in this industry that is being provided to every other American worker," the letter that was headed up by Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-FL) stated.

The lawmakers said the industry accounts for a huge amount of supply chain spending including port fees, and serves as a boon for travel agents, hotels and local goods and services. But U.S.-flag shipping interests were not swayed. “If cruise ship operators want our tax dollars, fly under our flag,” a statement released by the MM&P asserted.

“They’re taking advantage, locating in another country to fly a flag of convenience to not pay U.S. taxes,” said Steve Ellis with Taxpayers for Common Sense. “If they want to be incorporated in Bermuda, Liberia and Panama, why don’t those countries do the bail-out for them?”

U.S.-FLAG INTERESTS URGE PRESIDENT NOT TO WAIVE THE JONES ACT

U.S.-flag shipping interests, represented by almost 200 signatories, sent a letter to President Trump today asking him to keep the Jones Act strong and not issue any waiver. The President is reportedly meeting with oil and gas executives tomorrow (Friday, April 3) and they will undoubtedly point to the ongoing pandemic as a reason for waiving the Jones Act. M.E.B.A. signed onto the letter which noted that supplanting U.S.-jobs with foreigners is always a bad idea, but especially now during the ongoing crisis. Demand for petroleum products has eased dramatically with fewer people driving and flying, and there is no shortage of U.S.-flag bottoms to perform such work, they said. “A Jones Act waiver in these circumstances – replacing American mariners and American ships with foreign mariners and foreign ships in our home waters – is unnecessary and contrary to our collective need to come together as a nation to fight this virus,” the letter says. A copy of the letter can be found on M.E.B.A.’s website located at www.mebaunion.org.

CMES FALL SEMESTER SCHEDULE TO BE REVISED; REGISTRATION POSTPONED

Due to recent Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School cancellations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope and schedule of classes for the Fall Semester is being reconsidered. Likewise, the planned May 1 start for 2nd Semester registrations has been postponed.

Where possible, CMES is acting to integrate the canceled classes into the Fall Semester. A revised schedule will be released when the impact of the pandemic stabilizes and directives are issued from Federal, State, and Local governments. Notification will be sent out via All Ports Bulletin, *Telex Times*, and the School’s website (www.mebaschool.org) when the revised schedule and registration date have been released.

MSC HOSPITAL SHIPS BEGIN TAKING PATIENTS

The high-profile Military Sealift Command Hospital ships, perched on each side of the country, have begun accepting patients. The USNS MERCY, in Los Angeles, and the USNS COMFORT, in New York, are treating non-COVID-19 patients to ease the burden on shore-side hospitals.

The MERCY was part of a bizarre incident on Wednesday afternoon when a train engineer executed a half-baked plan to smash a train into the ship. 44-year old Eduardo Moreno ran the locomotive off the tracks through steel and concrete barriers, a parking lot and a chain link fence before the train ground to a stop under a span of the Vincent Thomas bridge, about 800 feet short of the vessel.

A California Highway Patrol officer witnessed the incident, pursued and caught the fleeing man, and made the arrest. Authorities say Moreno expressed suspicions over the vessel’s presence believing there was a Government cover-up about its “true purpose.” He believed it had some sinister

(unexplained) COVID-19 tie-in. Moreno told investigators, “You only get this chance once. The whole world is watching...I had to. People don’t know what’s going on here. Now they will.”

He was initially charged with “train wrecking” which carries a potential sentence of up to 20 years in prison. The MERCY was not impacted and they have begun to expand medical operations after arriving in San Pedro on Friday. The vessel is crewed with M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU civilian mariners. “The men and women embarked onboard MERCY are energized, eager, and ready to provide relief to those in need,” said MERCY Commanding Officer Captain John Rotruck.

The USNS COMFORT, on a similar mission, began accepting its first patients yesterday in New York Harbor after it arrived on Monday. On each coast, potential patients are assessed and screened prior to transfer to the vessel, and infection control procedures are strictly enforced. Both vessels provide a full spectrum of medical care including general surgeries, critical care and ward care for adults. There are no anticipated costs to patients treated on either ship.

NMC CONDUCTING BUSINESS ELECTRONICALLY

The National Maritime Center (NMC) issued an update as to its operational status and clarified that business is being conducted electronically. All 17 Regional Examination Centers (REC) and 3 Monitoring Units (MU) are closed for the time being. The Customer Service Center is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. EST, Monday through Thursday. Reach the call center at 1-888-IASKNMC (427-5662) or IASKNMC@uscg.mil. E-mail or live chat should be relied upon for answers to general questions.

Mailed or faxed applications currently cannot be processed. The electronic submission process is the only efficient way to conduct business at this time. Mailed documents are subject to delays. Submission guidance is located on the NMC website. Electronic submissions will only be accepted in PDF format; other formats such as .gif, .zip, or camera images will not be accepted. User fees must be paid using www.pay.gov. Include a scanned copy of your payment receipt with your application submission. In addition, NMC is unable to retrieve legacy mariner service records. Mariner applicants should make sure all necessary supporting documentation is contained in the electronic application.

AFL-CIO SAYS MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM VIRUS

The AFL-CIO points out that working people are still serving communities and risking their health while doing it. “I remain in awe of the courage, selflessness and bravery of our members in the face of the coronavirus pandemic,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said. “They deserve not only our gratitude but also commonsense standards that allow them to do their jobs and stay safe.” Workers are being forced to work without adequate protective gear or sick leave if they or their family members get sick. As a result, workers at places like Amazon, Instacart, and Whole Foods are walking off the job to demand stronger protections, and many are trying to form unions.

The Federation was heartened by many of the beneficial provisions in the stimulus bill that will help assist workers hit hard by the pandemic. In particular, they cited the expansion of the unemployment insurance program; increased funding for schools, hospitals, and state and local governments; relief for the airline industry (including worker rights protections); and critical funding to keep transit workers on the job.

However, more needs to be done. Trumka and AFL-CIO-affiliated unions called for Congressional action to protect front-line workers and help mitigate the public health crisis. Such steps they called for include the issuance of new occupational health and safety standards, worker protections such as paid leave, paid sick days, workers' compensation and unemployment insurance.

You can access the AFL-CIO's COVID-19 Pandemic Resources page, at <https://tinyurl.com/tlwtdmc>

ITF, ILO CALL FOR STEPS TO PROTECT SEAFARERS

The unions that make up the International Trade Workers' Federation (ITF) point out that our health workers are heroes - but there are also many others on the front lines, including those serving in the maritime industry, that keep the supply chain moving. Supply chains cannot be maintained without a workforce and these workers need to be supported to do their jobs. Reports have circulated that suppliers in some parts of the world have been prevented from boarding ships to give masks, overalls and other personal protective equipment to crews.

Trade unions wrote to leaders of the G20 calling for efforts to protect workers who continue transporting essential goods. They asked that such workers be exempt from travel restrictions and said that, "It is imperative that personal protective equipment is provided...and workers must have an active voice in day-to-day health and safety management."

The International Labor Organization (ILO) said that certain global ports have refused to allow some ships to enter - because they had previously docked in areas affected by COVID-19 – thus preventing vessels from obtaining essential supplies. ILO issued a statement calling on countries to "do all that they can to facilitate the delivery of essential medical supplies, fuel, water, spare parts and provisions to ships...Seafarers are just as worthy as everyone else and should be treated with dignity and respect to ensure that they can continue to provide their vital services to the world," the statement said. They also underlined the importance of ensuring that the flow of essential goods, energy, food, medicines and many other products around the world is not disrupted "by measures that impede the safe and efficient movement of ships and the seafarers who operate them."

WEBSITE COMPILES WORLDWIDE PORT/CREW RESTRICTIONS

A new website, updated daily, serves as a helpful resource to keep up with the pandemic's effect on ports around the world. The site lists each global seaport and how the virus is affecting port operations and crew changes. The site is continually updated using Coast Guard and local government information. The COVID-19 Port/Country Implications website, put together by Inchcape Shipping Services, can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/qm3f6g6>

SATURDAY IS JESSE CALHOON DAY

Saturday is "Jesse Calhoon Day" which is celebrated each April 4th. The day is set aside to honor longtime M.E.B.A. President Jesse Calhoon on the occasion of his birthday. Among many other achievements under Calhoon's administration, the Union established the training school which bears his name, merged the deep sea districts, Pacific Coast District and District 1 into a single all coast unit, and transformed M.E.B.A.'s pension plan into the best in the maritime industry. Born on April 4, 1923, Jesse made his final voyage on October 22, 2013 at the age of 90.

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