

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"



M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

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LEADERSHIP TEAM SET TO KEEP M.E.B.A. MOMENTUM GOING

The M.E.B.A. is poised and ready to welcome a new President on January 1 along with a leadership team of old and new faces to build on the Union's last seven years of progress. Adam Vokac, M.E.B.A.'s Executive Vice President for the past seven years and an instrumental voice on the Union's governing body – the District Executive Committee (DEC) – has been tapped by members to take over as District President for the next four years. The Union's election period ended on Monday following a 90-day balloting process.

Adam brings 10 years of Union official experience to the job (he also served as Representative in Honolulu for three years), holds an unlimited Chief Engineer's license and shipped out for years with the M.E.B.A. aboard various vessels. He has run a tight ship at the Oakland hall, helped lock up contract improvements and ferreted out new job opportunities for members. He was the Valedictorian of his graduating class at the United States Merchant Marine Academy (Kings Point) and is part of a DEC that is ready to hit the ground running and get to work for the membership.

Roland "Rex" Rexha is the Union's new Secretary-Treasurer and possesses the drive, instincts and hard-nosed tenacity of his protégé Bill Van Loo, who retires from the post after 35 great years with the Union. Rex has sailed with the Staten Island Ferries for over a dozen years and recently wrapped up his service as Shop Steward there as he joins the DEC and moves into Headquarters on January 1. Before the ferry system, he sailed Deep-Sea with the Union as an engineer for years on Interlake, Central Gulf, APL, Keystone and Patriot vessels.

Jason Callahan was elected to a new four-year term as the Union's Atlantic Coast V.P. after four steady years in the position working with Adam and the DEC to advance the interests of members. Jason is motivated and eager to keep working full ahead to further strengthen the Union and our job base.

New Executive V.P. Claudia Cimini, who will also become the Oakland Branch Agent, has served as a Convention Delegate at the National and District levels, but becomes a Union official for the first time. A Chief Engineer who has sailed Deep-Sea and inland during more than 20 years with the Union, Claudia has fought for and advocated for the M.E.B.A. with labor groups and politicians and has acute knowledge and understanding of labor union history and issues – especially relating to the M.E.B.A. She will be a strong and educated voice on the Union's DEC.

Adam Smith ascends to the District Executive Committee as the new Gulf Coast V.P./Houston Branch Agent after demonstrating competent and steady leadership during the past four years as Tampa Branch Agent. He has proven to be relentless in fighting on behalf of members – in many capacities including strict contract enforcement, job actions, and at the bargaining table. He takes over for Erin Bertram, who retired from the post following her 21 years of distinguished service at the Houston Union hall.

A six-person rank-and-file Tallying Committee oversaw the collection and tabulation of ballots on Monday (12/7) in M.E.B.A.'s District election. TrueBallot, Inc. served as the Impartial Administrator in charge of vote tabulation. Following the count, both TrueBallot and the Tallying Committee issued reports. Both reports were sent to the Union halls on Monday night following the certification of the vote. The reports are being discussed this week at the remaining December membership meetings, and will be part of the January Meeting packet.

The M.E.B.A. Tallying Committee consisted of Tracy Redding (Seattle), Reggie Abrams (Houston), Bill Cadden (NY/NJ), William Hardinge (Norfolk), Michael Ferrino (Tampa) and Kelsey Barrion (Alternate San Francisco/Oakland).

The Seattle and Los Angeles (San Pedro) Union halls will again feature officials with familiar faces working for the membership. Members returned Seattle Branch Agent Jeff Duncan to a third term in office again pairing him with Patrolman Kevin Cross who has served in that post for the past seven years. Jeff and Kevin will keep operations running on an even keel and are excited to keep battling on behalf of our membership. Rich Doherty also suits up for a third term as Branch Agent at the L.A. hall along with John McElhone who has served as Patrolman at the hall alongside Rich for the last seven years. They'll continue to be laser-focused on keeping our membership successful, expanding opportunities and fostering member engagement.

In Norfolk, Jack Menendez takes over as Branch Agent & Government Fleet Representative succeeding Tracy Burke who announced his departure from that position this summer. Jack has over 40 years of membership with the Union accruing a vast amount of experience at sea – sailing in the government and commercial fleets, and working ashore. He has served as an adjunct instructor at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School since 2005 while continuing to ship out as a deck officer. He spent time with the Navy, is well-versed on the challenges of the industry and is strongly motivated to channel his passion and energy into the job.

Nicole Greenway takes over at the Tampa hall as the new Branch Agent after Adam Smith moved up to the DEC and over to Houston. Nicole has sailed for years as an engineer on a variety of vessels and is enthusiastic to bring her strong organizational skills, know-how and deep commitment to our Union to fight for the rights and wages of our membership.

Max Alper has been elected as the Patrolman in Oakland after demonstrating his commitment and expertise in that position which he has held since 2017. He has proved available to members working hard on their behalf and made valuable contributions on numerous contract negotiations with a number of companies. He kept the Oakland hall running as a well-oiled machine and brings inexhaustible dedication and drive for a new four-year term.

Nico Sermoneta will continue his service as Patrolman in the New York/New Jersey hall and will build on seven years of experience in that role as he continues to help defend contracts, expand the Union's reach and make sure member needs are met.

The five members of the DEC and each of the Branch Agents, by virtue of their offices, will also serve as Delegates to the National M.E.B.A. Convention. In addition, 11 other Delegates were elected including all four M.E.B.A. Patrolmen. Delegates representing the District at the National M.E.B.A. Convention (that will take place on March 16, 2021) will be Adam Vokac, Roland "Rex" Rexha, Jason Callahan, Adam Smith, Claudia Cimini, Rich Doherty, Jack Menendez, Jeff Duncan, Nicole Greenway, Nico Sermoneta, Max Alper, John McElhone, Kevin Cross, Erik Barton, Mark S. Collins, Nils Djusberg, Michael R. Doherty, April Fleischer, Mark S. Gallagher and Serena Webber-Bey.

ELECTION "BLACK-OUT" RULES RELAXED

The election season policy in which the *Telex Times* does not mention candidates for M.E.B.A. office by name has concluded, following the tabulation of ballots. Since July, the newsletter strictly adhered to – and exceeded regulations stated in Section 401(g) of the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959 ("Landrum-Griffin"), 29 U.S.C. 481(g).

CDC: COVID-19 WELL-BEING & MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR MARINERS

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) has issued well-being and mental health resources for mariners during COVID-19. The resources were developed over the course of numerous meetings with industry partners.

They note that the pandemic has created additional challenges for mariners including fear and worry about their health, financial hardships, limited interaction with others, and restrictions while on board. CDC says that many of the typical recommendations to support mental health are not feasible for crewmembers on board ships with strict social and physical distancing measures in place.

The CDC mariner well-being and mental health resources have three areas of focus: being informed about ways to protect yourself and others, making healthy choices, and staying connected with others. Resources include a webpage (accessed at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/crew-well-being.html) and five accompanying infographics that address stress on board a ship, healthy ways to cope with stress, reporting COVID-19 symptoms, cruise ship status, and crewmember disembarkation. Two additional infographics addressing COVID-19 testing and facts are forthcoming.

Please share these resources with your colleagues. The resources may be particularly helpful for crewmembers who are experiencing increased stress or difficulty coping. The infographics are designed so they can be printed and posted throughout the ship since internet access may be limited.

FMC URGES MARAD & CDC TO PRIORITIZE MARITIME WORKFORCE FOR TESTING, PPE & VACCINES

Federal Maritime Commissioners Carl Bentzel and Daniel Maffei have urged Maritime Administrator Rear Adm. Mark Buzby and CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield to prioritize Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), rapid testing supplies, and vaccines for the maritime workforce.

Commissioners Bentzel and Maffei said. "The maritime and port workforces have been and continue to be an underpublicized success story in keeping our Nation afloat during the economic dislocation caused by COVID-19. If the maritime, port, and sealift workforces are infected, then our supply chain

essentially will become infected...It is imperative we ensure port operations and continuity of the labor workforce through the provision of protective health supplies, rapid testing supplies, and vaccination availability.”

DEFENSE BILL CONTAINS PLETHORA OF MARITIME PROVISIONS

The annual defense bill winding toward passage – though not without drama – contains numerous provisions benefiting the maritime industry. The conference report of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2021, has already passed the House by a large margin and is imminently set to gain approval from the U.S. Senate.

However, the President has threatened to veto the bipartisan bill that authorizes \$740.5 billion in defense spending. He has objected to language in the bill that renames military bases honoring Confederate leaders, and is unhappy the bill fails to repeal Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 that protects social media companies from liability for user posts. Maritime provisions in the bill are not controversial and will likely become law once the drama between Congress and the President plays out. Some of the important maritime provisions in the bill include:

MSP Funding – The bill authorizes an increase of \$180 million in total funding for the Maritime Security Program for FY '21. While Congress must enact subsequent appropriations in order for vessel operators to receive the funding, the additional monies are intended to provide relief to the U.S.-flag fleet of vessels enrolled in the Program as the industry responds to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Establishment of an Oil Tanker Security Fleet - Under the NDAA conference report, a fleet of 10 commercial U.S.-flag petroleum product tankers would be established, at a total cost of \$60 million at \$6 million per vessel. Modeled after the MSP, the tanker fleet reflects our nation’s long-term strategic defense needs and would reduce the U.S. military’s reliance on foreign-flag commercial vessels while also expanding the qualified mariner pool.

Audit on Cargo Preference Enforcement - The non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) shall conduct an audit of each federal agency required to comply with U.S. cargo preference laws. The congressionally mandated study will provide an analysis of the level of cargoes shipped on U.S.-flag vessels as well as instances in which cargoes are shipped on foreign-flag vessels under non-availability waivers, but not counted as such for purposes of calculating cargo preference compliance.

Restrictions on the Jones Act Waivers - This provision ensures that the Secretary of Defense may request waivers to the Jones Act only when there is an immediate adverse effect on military operations. Specifically, no later than 24 hours after making the request, the Secretary of Defense must inform Congress of the circumstances requiring the waiver, including a certification that there are insufficient Jones Act-qualified vessels to meet the needs of national defense without a waiver. Waivers may not be granted for more than 10 days at a time, and may be extended for an additional 10 days upon approval by the Maritime Administrator, but may not exceed a total of 45 days.

APPLY FOR VACATION & PORT RELIEF BENEFITS

•**FILING DEADLINE:** *The deadline for issuing checks dated in 2020 in the M.E.B.A. Outports and the Plan Office is Thursday, December 17, 2020.*

•**DIRECT DEPOSIT:** *The final Direct Deposit Transfer for 2020 will be made on 12/18/2020 and the funds will be deposited into bank accounts on 12/22/2020.*

•**Any requests for Port Relief and Vacation checks received after 12/17/20 at 12:00 PM EST will be paid in the order received beginning 1/4/2021.**

Any member who requires that his/her check be dated in 2020 must file before this deadline. Remember, Friday December 25, 2020 and Friday January 1, 2021 are holidays and the Outports and the Plan Office will be closed. It is always wise to plan ahead, so you should verify the specific holiday schedule with the Plan Office Representative.

Split Your Vacation Payments between 2020 and 2021

You can submit an Application for Vacation Pay prior to the end of the year and request that the payment of your vacation benefits be split. Two checks will be issued to you, one in 2020 and a second in 2021. The 12/17/2020 deadline applies to split claims also. The vacation benefits paid in this manner MUST be a continuous vacation period.

Please contact the M.E.B.A. Vacation Plan staff in Baltimore at 800-811-6322 or 410-547-9111 if you have any questions.

ONLINE JANUARY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS – (All times are local)

Monday, January 4 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;

Tuesday, January 5 – CMES@1430 (*CMES Meeting will be conducted In-Person*); Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;

Wednesday, January 6 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

Thursday, January 7 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

Friday, January 8 – Honolulu@1100.

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The M.E.B.A. is the nation's oldest maritime labor union, established in 1875. M.E.B.A.'s expertise and demonstrated track record of readiness, safety, and loyalty in answering America's call to action in times of both peace and war is unrivaled in the world. M.E.B.A. HQ – Phone: (202) 638-5355; mebahq@mebaunion.org. Visit us on Facebook. For publication and related inquiries (and to send photos & hot news tips) contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – marco@mebaunion.org. Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram.