

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"



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POLICY OF 355-SHIP NAVY APPROVED AS PART OF DEFENSE BILL

The “National Defense Authorization Act” (NDAA) signed into law this week, includes a provision that makes it the official policy of the United States to achieve the Navy’s minimum requirement for a 355-ship fleet. Currently, only 279 ships are in the battle fleet. The provision was championed by Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Chairman of the Senate Seapower Committee. The 355-ship level recommended by the “Securing the Homeland by Increasing our Power on the Seas (SHIPS) Act” could take up to 30 years to achieve.

“With his signature, President Trump has confirmed the United States’ resolve to meet the growing needs of our U.S. Navy,” Sen. Wicker said. “Building up our nation’s fleet is essential to protecting our national security and projecting American power around the globe. We are asking too few ships to do too many things, and today the President took a major step toward rectifying that problem. In the coming weeks, I look forward to working with my colleagues to put together a budget that fully supports our American military personnel and keeps us focused on our goal to achieve a full 355-ship fleet.”

The defense bill authorizes nearly \$700 billion in funding for America’s service members, military installations, and industrial base. The bill includes a nearly \$5 billion increase for shipbuilding above President Trump’s budget request, and gives active-duty military personnel a 2.4 percent pay raise.

NTSB REPORT PINPOINTS FACTORS IN EL FARO SINKING

This week, the National Transportation Safety Board issued their conclusions on the deadliest shipping disaster involving a U.S.-flagged vessel in more than 30 years – the SS EL FARO. They primarily zeroed in on the captain’s failure to avoid sailing into the hurricane despite numerous opportunities to route a course away from hazardous weather. The 790-foot, cargo vessel, S.S. EL FARO, en route from Jacksonville, Florida, to San Juan, Puerto Rico, sank Oct. 1, 2015, in the Atlantic Ocean during Hurricane Joaquin, taking the lives of all 33 aboard.

“We may never understand why the captain failed to heed his crew’s concerns about sailing into the path of a hurricane, or why he refused to chart a safer course away from such dangerous weather,” said NTSB Chairman Robert L. Sumwalt. “But we know all too well the devastating consequences of those decisions.”

The ship departed Florida Sept. 29, 2015, and had a range of navigation options that would have allowed it to steer clear of the storm that later became a Category 4 hurricane. The NTSB said that the captain, consulting outdated weather forecasts and ignoring the suggestions of his bridge officers to take the ship farther south and away from the storm, ordered a course that intersected with the path of a hurricane that pounded the ship with 35-foot seas and 100 mph winds.

“Although El Faro and its crew should never have found themselves in such treacherous weather, that ship was not destined to sink,” said Sumwalt. “If the crew had more information about the status of the hatches, how to best manage the flooding situation, and the ship’s vulnerabilities when in a sustained list, the accident might have been prevented.”

As a result of the 26-month long investigation, the NTSB made 29 recommendations to the U.S. Coast Guard, two to the Federal Communications Commission, one to the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, nine to the International Association of Classification Societies, one to the American Bureau of Shipping, one to Furuno Electric Company and 10 to TOTE Services. The complete accident report will be available in several weeks. The executive summary, including the findings, probable cause and safety recommendations is available at <https://go.usa.gov/xnRAn>.

BREAKFAST WITH THE NAVY SECRETARY

In his first industry event since being confirmed as Secretary of the Navy, Richard Spencer fielded a range of questions regarding the direction the Navy is headed. James Caponiti, President of the American Maritime Congress asked several pointed questions including one about the Administration’s views concerning possible U.S. ratification as a signatory to the 1982 U.N. Law of the Sea Convention. The LOSC came into force in 1994 absent of the U.S. as a signatory. The Navy League says joining the Convention would reinforce and codify freedom of navigation rights such as unrestricted passage through critical international straits and freedom to operate in exclusive economic zones accounting for almost 40% of the world’s oceans. It would also provide a firm foundation for maritime counterterrorism, counterproliferation and law enforcement operations.

SECNAV acknowledged that U.S. military forces adhere to principles contained within the LOS Convention as a practical matter despite resistance thus far by the U.S. Senate leaving the U.S. as the only nation that has yet to ratify the treaty. Given the state of China’s excessive territorial claims in the South China Sea, the ability to exercise protest options as a signatory to the Convention underscores the importance of ratification. The Navy League pointed out that “as long as the United States remains outside the Convention, our [*critically important commercial*] maritime activities must find legal support in a complicated combination of older, less advantageous treaties, as well as ‘customary international law,’ which is unwritten, easily distorted and potentially changed by those who do not share our interests.”

Adherence to a rules-based system has been critical to furthering peace, stability, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. This system provides the basis for shared use of maritime waterways and resources, and ensures safe operations within the maritime domain. This is why the United States military operates consistent with – even though the U.S. Senate has yet to provide its advice and consent – the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Law of the Sea Convention), which reflects customary international law with respect to traditional uses of the ocean.

NOAA REPORTS ARCTIC WARMING NEARED RECORD

A NOAA-sponsored report shows that the warming trend transforming the Arctic persisted in 2017 resulting in the second warmest air temperatures, above average ocean temperatures, loss of sea ice, and a range of human, ocean and ecosystem effects. While 2017 saw fewer records shattered than in 2016, the Arctic shows no sign of returning to the reliably frozen region it was decades ago. Arctic temperatures continue to increase at double the rate of the global temperature increase.

“The rapid and dramatic changes we continue to see in the Arctic present major challenges and opportunities,” said retired Navy Rear Adm. Timothy Gallaudet, Ph.D., acting NOAA administrator. “This year’s Arctic Report Card is a powerful argument for why we need long-term sustained Arctic observations to support the decisions that we will need to make to improve the economic well-being for Arctic communities, national security, environmental health and food security.”

COAST GUARD COMMANDANT ADVOCATES FOR JONES ACT

Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul F. Zukunft offered a full-throated defense of the Jones Act this week while talking shop at a Navy League breakfast. He mostly spoke about Coast Guard missions but changed gears and took the opportunity to stress the critical role the Jones Act plays for our national security. He shook his head at unthinking critics who have called for the repeal of the Act. If we end the Jones Act, he said, we are exporting our maritime workforce including our mariners and will need to depend on foreign powers to carry our critical cargo. He noted how we’d likely need to rely on shipbuilding power South Korea for commercial ships “at a time when the DPRK can annihilate a good portion of South Korea at a moment’s notice.” He also pointed out that the Jones Act doesn’t apply to the U.S. Virgin Islands, “yet commodities are about 25% more expensive *[there]* than they are in Puerto Rico.”

Instead of repealing something, he noted, “why don’t [we] enact something? Why don’t [we] ratify the law of the sea convention?”

“I will continue to advocate on behalf of the Jones Act,” the Commandant promised.

TAKE FIVE MINUTES TO SUPPORT THE JONES ACT

Over 20,000 letters have been sent to Members of Congress to help counteract the wave of anti-Jones Act B.S. that flooded social media following Hurricane Maria and its devastation of Puerto Rico. We need to send more letters! Don’t let the Average Joe (or Jane) be influenced by the lies. Take five minutes and tell your Congressional delegation how critical the Jones Act is for U.S.-flag shipping. Click on this link for a ready-made (modifiable) pro-Jones Act letter – <https://tinyurl.com/JonesActLetter> Fill in your info and a few clicks later, your entire Congressional representation will take note their constituent is urging them to support the Jones Act. With all the lies and misinformed anti-Jones Act nonsense that has fouled the waters in the wake of Hurricane Maria, five minutes of your time can really make a difference.

STEVE SCALISE IS AMP’S MARITIME CHAMP

The American Maritime Partnership (AMP) recognized U.S. Congressman Steve Scalise (R-LA) this week with the 2017 ‘Champion of Maritime’ Award for his extraordinary support and dedication to the American maritime industry. Rep. Scalise is a long-standing advocate of the Jones Act and recognizes not only the critical contribution that the American maritime industry makes to Louisiana

by providing thousands of family-waged jobs in the state, but also the critical importance of this industry to the nation's economic, national, and homeland security interests.

"I'm honored to receive the Champion of Maritime Award, Rep. Scalise noted. "... America's maritime industry is not only responsible for creating and supporting hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs across our country, it is also a critical component of America's homeland security strategy. I have long been a strong advocate for the hardworking men and women in America's maritime industry who work tirelessly to protect our waterways, and I'll continue to fight every day to defend and uphold the Jones Act, which is vital to the national and economic security of our country."

As a steadfast advocate for the domestic maritime industry, Rep. Scalise demonstrated his unwavering commitment earlier this year when he defended the importance of the lawful interpretation of the Jones Act while U.S. Customs and Border Protection reviewed a flawed letter ruling.

M.E.B.A. HOLIDAY PARTIES

M.E.B.A. Holiday parties – What's left – (to take place at the hall or office unless otherwise *noted*):

M.E.B.A. Headquarters - Thursday, Dec. 14th (3 p.m.) (*Hapless Editor currently putting out the Telex instead of partying*)

L.A./Wilmington - Friday, Dec. 15th – (1 p.m.)

Cleveland – Cookie tray!

New Orleans - Friday Dec. 15 – (1 p.m.)

POID – Friday, Dec. 15 - (12-3) (26 Century Blvd. Conf. Room #110)

Seattle - Friday, Dec. 15 - (1 pm)

VACATION BENEFITS – 2017 YEAR-END CLOSING

Apply for Vacation and Port Relief Benefits early to avoid the year-end rush. **FILING DEADLINE:** The deadline for issuing checks dated in 2017 in the outports *and* the Plan Office is Tuesday, December 19, 2017. **DIRECT DEPOSIT:** The final Direct Deposit Transfer for 2017 will be made on 12/20/2017 and the funds will be deposited into your bank account on 12/22/2017. Any requests for Port Relief and Vacation checks received after 12/19/17 at 5:00 PM will be paid on 1/2/2018. Any member who requires that his/her check be dated in 2017 must file before this deadline. Remember, Monday December 25, 2017 and Monday January 1, 2018 are holidays and the outports and the Plan Office will be closed. It is always wise to plan ahead, so you should verify your specific outport holiday schedule with the Plan Office Representative. ***Split Your Vacation Payments between 2017 and 2018*** -- 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 2017 and a second in 2018. The 12/19/2017 deadline applies to split claims also. The vacation benefits paid in this manner **MUST** be a **continuous vacation period**. Please contact the Vacation Plan staff in Baltimore at 800-811-6322 or 410-547-9111 if you have any questions.

AMERICAN MADE GIFTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

It's not always so easy to find a truly American-made gift. Labor 411 compiled the list below with some of you favorite union-made brands that are either 100 percent domestically produced or very close to it. These items are made by companies that treat their workers well. By hunting down these ultra-domestic products, not only will you bring a smile to the gift recipient, you will also help stimulate the economy and strengthen the middle class.

Filson clothes and bags; Kauai Coffee; Cutco knives; Chateau Ste. Michelle wine; Omaha Steaks; Harley Davidson; Jack Daniel's whiskey; Buffalo Trace bourbon; See's Candies; Ghirardelli Chocolate; Stanley Tools – American Heritage collection; Turning Leaf wine.

Other gift ideas involving ethical companies: For Fixing – Armstrong; Black & Decker Tools; Channellock; Craftsman; Klein Tools; Ridgid; SnapOn Tools; Stanley Hand Tools; Union Tools; Warwood; For Playing - American Athletic Gym Equipment; Bell Sports; Ebonite Bowling Balls; Louisville Slugger; Remington Arms; Standard Golf Company; Wilson Sporting Goods. For the Road - Chevrolet Colorado; Chevrolet Silverado; Ford F Series; GMC Canyon; GEM Sierra; Ram 1500.

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS

Monday, January 8 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;

Tuesday, January 9 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;

Wednesday, January 10 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

Thursday, January 11 – L.A.@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

Friday, January 12 – Honolulu@1100.

-----FINISHED WITH ENGINES-----



The M.E.B.A. is the nation's oldest maritime labor union, established in 1875. M.E.B.A.'s expertise and proven 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 contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – marco@mebaunion.org