

## 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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#### **MSC HOSPITAL SHIP WRAPS UP MOMENTOUS HUMANITARIAN MISSION**

The Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS COMFORT returned to its berth in Norfolk, VA on Tuesday after an 11-week medical assistance mission in Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Honduras as part of Operation Enduring Promise. M.E.B.A. represents the engineers in MSC's Civilian Mariner fleet. The rest of the Civilian Mariners onboard are represented by MM&P and SIU.

The ship's crew included more than 465 U.S. and partner nation military doctors, nurses and corpsmen, 90 medical and dental professional volunteers and 70 MSC CIVMARs. During the mission, the COMFORT visited Esmeraldas, Ecuador; Paita, Peru; Turbo, Colombia; Riohacha, Colombia; and Trujillo, Honduras.

"The men and women on USNS COMFORT...treated over 26,000 patients and conducted approximately 600 surgeries aboard the ship and at land-based sites," said Rear Adm. Sean Buck, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command. "Their work made a big difference in Central and South America in ways both concrete and intangible for years to come."

During the port visits, COMFORT's medical team conducted a variety of surgeries including cataracts, hernias, cleft palates and more. Additionally, COMFORT hosted approximately 1,000 distinguished visitors and guests during 53 distinguished visitor and media days to include the President of Honduras and Prime Minister of Peru.

"Our team did a great job working with partners from 11 different countries and non-governmental organizations," said Capt. Kevin Buckley, commanding officer of the COMFORT's Medical Treatment Facility. "The team really came together during this deployment and used all of our skills while working with our partners to the south. As a professional, working with everyone on this deployment was truly an awesome experience."

#### **JONES ACT DISSENT FROM HISPANIC CAUCUS**

U.S. shipping interests have some work to do in the new Congress to educate the many new Members and other lawmakers, including those on the local level, who don't truly grasp the vital benefits of the Jones Act to the U.S. economy and our national security.

The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators recently passed a resolution calling for the repeal of the Jones Act. New Jersey State Senator Nellie Pou co-sponsored the resolution with Pennsylvania Representative Ángel Cruz. The resolution, presented at their annual meeting in San Diego, passed in a 56-10 vote. It can be viewed by following this link: [https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2018/2018\\_04/](https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2018/2018_04/)

Sen. Pou noted, “The Jones Act was enacted a century ago to protect the American maritime industry. Today, experts agree that the statute is harmful to that very same industry due to its anti-competitive restrictions, which harms consumers; especially in Puerto Rico, Alaska, and other jurisdictions. I am a champion of working families and the unions that represent them. On this issue, however, there’s little evidence to support the theory that repealing the Jones Act would lead to massive job loss. In fact, the competition spurred by a Jones Act repeal would likely create more business for US ports as a result, which would be a boon, not only for the economy, but also for the environment, as transporting goods through sea vessels is the most climate-friendly method of mass transportation.”

The M.E.B.A. disagrees that there are “experts” anywhere that agree the “statute is harmful.” In fact, leaders responsible for coordinating the deployment of our nation’s military force overseas are acutely aware of the critical importance of the U.S. Merchant Marine to our national security as well as the vital need for statutes such as the Jones Act to support American jobs in the maritime sector. The Jones Act has supported our nation in both peace and war since 1775 and is a boon for the economy with an annual economic output of \$100 billion.

Anti-Jones Act forces are quick to cite the biased 2012 Puerto Rico-sponsored report that claimed prices are double for the island because of the Jones Act. Yet they’re just as quick to dismiss the nonpartisan U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) 2013 report that effectively refuted those claims. In addition, a recent report “The Impact of the Jones Act on Puerto Rico,” concluded the Jones Act has no impact on either retail prices or the cost of living in Puerto Rico. It also found that state-of-the-art maritime technology, Puerto-Rico focused investments, and the dedicated closed-loop service offered by Jones Act carriers provide a significant positive economic impact to the island, at freight rates lower or comparable to similar services to other Caribbean Islands.

The CATO Institute issued a statement of support for the Caucus resolution which was surely cheered on by foreign interests who are determined to usurp U.S.-flag shipping. CATO noted, “Unlike many in Washington, [the Caucus] recognizes both the economic burden this archaic law places upon their constituents and the thin nature of its national security justification.”

Thankfully there are many Jones Act supporters who are not in agreement with the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators or the CATO Institute on the strength and need for the Jones Act, as it enjoys wide bipartisan support.

A compromised Jones Act would not only surrender the U.S.-flagged and –crewed coastwise trade to our foreign counterparts, it would also allow foreign vessels and crews to reign supreme in the nation’s interior. Jones Act opponents seldom think about the 40,000 small U.S.-flag/crewed brown water vessels circulating throughout our nation’s waterways that often carry sensitive and hazardous cargoes.

The preservation of the Jones Act and other statutes and programs that help maintain the U.S.-flag fleet has been the focus of M.E.B.A.’s Political Action Fund. Without it and other programs such as the Maritime Security Program and cargo preference, qualified American mariners will disappear and

the carriage of critical national-interest cargo will be forfeited to foreign mariners and overseas interests.

The P.A.F. is able to utilize its limited resources to continually battle back against misguided schemes of anti-Jones Act lawmakers. Members, Applicants and Retirees are encouraged to support the P.A.F. to provide the ammunition it needs to fight for a thriving U.S.-flag industry – instead of one that is simply maintaining a pulse. For your job, and for the future of U.S.-flag shipping, please make a contribution to the P.A.F. today.

### **COAST GUARD EXTENDS PERIOD FOR MARINER MEDICAL MANUAL INPUT**

The Coast Guard has extended the period for public comment on how its draft Merchant Mariner Medical Manual can be improved. The comment period has been extended a month until Feb. 13. The Manual provides guidance for seafarers to meet medical certificate requirements. Among other things, it includes procedures for application, issuance, and cancellation of the medical certificate. The Coast Guard wants comments to emphasize Manual readability, clarity, and ease of use. They are particularly interested in whether the draft Manual adequately addresses safety concerns in situations where the Coast Guard receives information indicating that a medical certificate holder has developed a medical condition that poses a significant risk of sudden incapacitation, or is taking a medication that poses a significant risk of impairment.

Comments must be submitted to the online docket, USCG-2018-0041, via <http://www.regulations.gov>, on or before Feb. 13, 2019. For information about this document call or email Adrienne Buggs, M.D., United States Coast Guard, Office of Merchant Mariner Credentialing; telephone (202) 372-2357, email: [MMCPolicy@uscg.mil](mailto:MMCPolicy@uscg.mil)

### **GREAT LAKES CARGO: STEADY AS SHE GOES**

As the Great Lakes shipping season winds to a close with the onset of winter, the Lake Carriers' Association issued its latest cargo figures for the last completed month, stats that mirror freight movement on the Lakes a year ago. LCA, represents 13 companies that operate vessels on the Great Lakes including M.E.B.A.-contracted Interlake Steamship Company.

U.S.-flag Great Lakes freighters moved 8.6 million tons of cargo in November, a virtual repeat of a year ago. The November float was also a near carbon copy of the month's 5-year average. Iron ore cargos for steel production totaled 4.6 million tons, an increase of 9.6 percent compared to a year ago. Coal loads totaled 1.3 million tons, again little changed from a year ago. Shipments of aggregate, fluxstone, chemical stone and scrubber stone totaled 2.3 million tons, a decrease of 8 percent compared to a year ago. Year-to-date U.S.-flag cargo movement stands at 75.3 million tons, a decrease of 4.2 percent compared to the same point in 2017. Iron ore cargos total 40.6 million tons, a decrease of 2.2 percent. Coal loadings total 10.3 million tons, a decrease of 14.7 percent. Limestone totals 20.6 million tons, an increase of 88,000 tons compared to a year ago.

### **REMINDER: INCLUDE ALL DOCS WHEN FILING FOR VACATION PAY**

Members are reminded to be thorough when submitting an application for Vacation Pay at the halls and/or with the Plans Office and include all required documents, including Coast Guard Discharges and pay vouchers. Pay vouchers are used to track Social Security Tax maximums, to track wages as Medicare Tax increases and to check for any overlap days that can be identified. As detailed on the application itself, the following documents must be submitted along with your application:

- A copy of the stub portion of your last vacation benefit check.
- Coast Guard discharges and pay vouchers covering all employment since your last vacation.
- Pay vouchers must cover the entire period of employment and show all wages and tax deductions.
- Pay vouchers covering any periods of unearned wages since your last vacation.

***Failure to submit proof of all accumulated work performed to the date of application could result in the permanent loss of vacation benefits earned on the employment not submitted.***

You may also need to submit:

- A Carry-Over Vacation Form from your last vacation – if applicable.
- An original copy of the Converted Overtime Worksheet, if applicable, regardless of whether or not you are applying for converted overtime vacation.
- A letter from an authorized Union official granting permission for early return or excess sailing, if applicable.

*If prior written permission is not obtained and an Officer returns to work early, they will be subject to a penalty which is loss of vacation benefits for the next six months of employment (180 days).*

You can contact the Vacation Plan staff in Baltimore prior to sending an application. They can be reached at 800-811-6322 or 410-547-9111.

### **MEMBERS IN GOOD STANDING CAN WEIGH IN ON PROPOSED SHIPPING RULE**

Members in good standing have until the end of the year to vote on the District-wide Online Shipping Rule Referendum. The online referendum began on December 1 and continues until midnight on December 31<sup>st</sup>. A letter about the referendum explaining how to gain access was sent to all members at their address on file at Headquarters. In addition, an email was sent to all members who have a valid email address on file with Headquarters. Members can email Marco C. at HQ (marco@mebaunion.org) should they experience any voting problems.

Members who did not complete payment of their Fourth Quarter dues by December 17<sup>th</sup>, as specified in the M.E.B.A. By-Laws, are not eligible to participate.

This is a one-question referendum on a possible change to the Shipping Rules to permit new Group III applicants to remain on the Port Relief List for one year from the date of their first registration. The Rule change is designed to extend the window for new applicants to seek viable shipping opportunities as they begin their seafaring careers.

A rank and file Tallying Committee will be elected at the January meetings to verify eligibility of voters and ensure the integrity of the process. Voting results will then become official.

### **VACATION BENEFITS - 2018 YEAR-END CLOSING**

- Any requests for Port Relief and Vacation checks received after 12/17/18 at 5:00 PM will be paid on 1/2/2019. Remember, Tuesday December 25, 2018 and Tuesday January 1, 2019 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 2018 and 2019* - 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 2018 and a second in 2019. The 12/17/2018 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.

**REGULAR MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

Monday, January 7 – **Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;**  
Tuesday, January 8 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;**  
Wednesday, January 9 – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;**  
Thursday, January 10 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;**  
Friday, January 11 – **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](mailto: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](mailto:marco@mebaunion.org)*