

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*



## M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

*The Official Union Newsletter*



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### **VAN LOO, MARITIME WITNESSES BRIEF CONGRESSIONAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE OF U.S. MERCHANT MARINE**

M.E.B.A. Secretary-Treasurer Bill Van Loo was one of eight witnesses testifying before a Congressional Subcommittee on Wednesday about the capabilities and needs of the U.S.-flag maritime industry.

Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Chairman of the Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation Subcommittee (part of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee) oversaw the hearing that explored various facets of the industry aimed at ensuring a viable U.S.-flag Merchant Marine thus aiding our nation's economy and national security.

Van Loo, speaking on behalf of the M.E.B.A., AMO, MM&P and SIU, talked about the erosion of the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine and the associated mariner base. He stressed that Members of Congress should reassert their support for key maritime statutes and adopt new initiatives to help expand the U.S.-flag fleet – which in turn would swell the ranks of American mariners. "In order to remain available in times of war and to support our Nation's economic security, the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine must be supported during times of peace," he testified.

He called for a "coordinated approach to a national maritime policy that starts with ensuring a steady stream of cargo." With a massive infrastructure spending bill inching forward, he told the subcommittee the "renewal of the U.S. Merchant Marine" needs to be part of the discussions.

Van Loo voiced the unions' praise of the Subcommittee's tireless efforts to extend and secure full funding for the Maritime Security Program. In addition, Ranking Member John Garamendi's legislation entitled "Energizing American Maritime Act" was lauded as a positive initiative to boost U.S.-flag cargoes in the energy sector. Van Loo urged that lawmakers and the Administration put a priority on incentivizing commercial cargoes onboard U.S.-flag ships while noting that the U.S.-flag currently accounts for only 2% of the global U.S. trade. "One way this can be accomplished is through the negotiation of bilateral shipping agreements. Congress should give the Administration whatever additional authority it needs to negotiate meaningful bilateral cargo sharing agreements with America's trading partners to provide U.S.-flag vessels with a greater share of our foreign trade."

"It is very simple," Van Loo said. "Without cargo, our ships do not sail and our mariners do not stand by."

“Cargo is king,” Maritime Administrator Rear Admiral Mark Buzby testified in the lead panel. It determines “the number of ships in the U.S.-flagged fleet, and the number of ships then influences the number of mariners who are available to run those ships and maintain a strong, resilient, U.S. Merchant Marine.” There are only 82 internationally-trading U.S.-flag ships at present and the erosion of the U.S. fleet that has led us to this point is especially worrisome, he noted, as it will impair the nation’s sealift readiness. Already the Administrator fears there aren’t enough qualified mariners to sustain sealift operations after the initial surge. Continued erosion of the fleet could further jeopardize our capabilities.

He discussed the importance of cargo preference laws and the Maritime Security Program and talked about the need to recapitalize the Ready Reserve Force fleet to ensure the readiness of the 46 RRF ships (average age=43 years).

Citing the 40,000 small U.S.-flag/crewed brown water vessels circulating throughout our nation’s waterways (often carrying sensitive and hazardous cargoes), Chairman Hunter asked the Administrator about the importance that those vessels be controlled by U.S. mariners instead of foreign counterparts.

“Those [American] mariners are a de facto layer of our national security,” Administrator Buzby declared voicing strong support for a heavy U.S.-flag presence. “And the Jones Act makes that possible,” Chairman Hunter interjected. “Yes sir!” Buzby agreed.

Further emphasis on the issues important to us was provided by USA Maritime, represented through testimony delivered by American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier (ARC) President Eric Ebeling. USA Maritime is a coalition of maritime unions, associations and shipping companies – including the M.E.B.A. and American Maritime Congress – fighting for the U.S. Merchant Marine.

He offered three suggestions to stave off the precipitous decline of available government preference cargoes including “faithful execution” of strengthened cargo preference enforcement tools. He also called for “100% of all government-owned or financed cargoes to move on U.S.-flag ships.” In addition, he stressed that the Export-Import Bank must be afforded a quorum so that it can return to full functioning power. Importantly, a portion of cargo generated by the Bank is required to be transported aboard U.S.-flag ships and only U.S. vessels can be used for Bank transactions above \$20 million.

Several others testified on aspects of the industry including American Maritime Partnership President Matt Woodruff, Offshore Marine Service Association President Aaron Smith and Shipbuilders Council of America President Matthew Paxton.

There was lingering discussion about a Customs and Border Protection ruling, later withdrawn by the agency early last year, that would have helped strengthen Jones Act requirements related to the transportation of offshore oil and gas operation equipment. The initiative would have closed loopholes exploited by foreign shipping interests allowing them to transport equipment from the U.S. mainland to U.S. rigs using foreign-flag vessels. Foreign interests cheered the withdrawal of the ruling, witnesses asserted. It was urged that Congress and the Administration rally behind such initiatives that emphasize “Buy American, Hire American.”

You can view the prepared witness testimonies and also watch the hearing by visiting the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/maritimehearing>

## **UNION PLUS SCHOLARSHIPS**

M.E.B.A. members, retirees and their families have until the end of January to apply for college education assistance money through Union Plus. In 2017, 106 union members and union family members were awarded \$150,000 in Union Plus Scholarships, ranging from \$500 to \$4,000. These one-time cash awards are for study beginning in the fall of 2017. Applications, including essays and a reference letter, must be submitted by January 31 at 12 noon EST. Since 1991, the Union Plus Scholarship Program has awarded over \$4.2 million to students of union families. M.E.B.A.'s connection with Union Plus nets our members a range of benefits and discounts. Union Plus programs, which are available to M.E.B.A. members, retirees and our affiliates, provide a vast range of money-saving benefits and services.

The Union is enrolled in dozens of moneysaving U.P. programs ranging from life insurance to financing children's educations. Our members have been scholarship recipients quite a few times since the program began. Union Plus Scholarship are granted to students attending a two-year college, four-year college, graduate school or a recognized technical or trade school. Recipients are selected based on academic ability, social awareness, financial need and appreciation of labor. A GPA of 3.0 or higher is recommended. The required essays can account for up to half your total score. Scholarship applicants are judged by a committee of impartial post-secondary educators

A complete application must be received on or before 12:00 p.m. (Eastern Time) on January 31, 2018. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered. Amounts range from \$500 to \$4,000. These one-time cash awards are for study beginning in the Fall of 2018. Students may re-apply each year. Visit [www.unionplus.org/benefits/money/union-plus-scholarships](http://www.unionplus.org/benefits/money/union-plus-scholarships) to get all the details including eligibility criteria and to secure the official application.

## **VACATION REMINDER: CHECK YOUR RETURN TO WORK DATE**

Members on vacation should make certain of their return-to-work date to ensure there is no conflict with your vacation when taking a job at a hall. Members should know that taking work while on vacation or receiving a paid vacation benefit – without express permission/waiver from a Branch Agent/V.P. – violates both the M.E.B.A. Shipping Rules and Vacation Plan regulations and will trigger penalties including possible loss of vacation time.

Refer to Shipping Rule #5(b) and the M.E.B.A. Vacation Plan Summary Plan Description (Pages 7-10) for reference.

## **BENKERT AWARD NOMINATIONS**

The Coast Guard is accepting nominations for its 2018 Biennial Rear Admiral William M. Benkert Environmental Protection Award. The award recognizes corporations and businesses involved in marine facility or vessel operations that have demonstrated sustained excellence and outstanding achievement in protecting the marine environment. It also encourages innovations in operations, maintenance, cargo handling, refueling and training while providing a means to share best practices with others in the maritime community. Applications should be submitted by January 26, 2018. The award will be presented during the American Petroleum Institute Panel and Luncheon in New Orleans, Louisiana March 2, 2018.

For award criteria and instructions for submitting an application, please visit the Admiral Benkert award homepage at <https://tinyurl.com/benkert>

## **SEMI-SYNTHETIC OPIATES ADDED TO DRUG SCREENING**

As of January 1, 2018, drug testing requirements were beefed up to include semi-synthetic opiates. The Department of transportation, in tandem with the Coast guard, issued a Marine Safety Advisory (MSA) to help broadcast the recent changes. Hydrocodone, hydromorphone, oxymorphone, and oxycodone (the most common prescription drugs of abuse) were added to drug-testing program regulations in the "Opioids" section. In addition to the existing DOT drug testing panel that tests for marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, phencyclidine (PCP), and opiates, mariners in safety-sensitive positions will also be tested for the four additional semi-synthetic opioids named above. Some common names for these semi-synthetic opioids include OxyContin®, Percodan®, Percocet®, Vicodin®, Lortab®, Norco®, Dilaudid®, Exalgo®.

If a mariner tests positive for any of the semi-synthetic opioid drugs, then as with any other drug test result that is confirmed by the laboratory, the Medical Review Officer (MRO) will conduct an interview with the mariner to determine if there is a legitimate medical explanation for the result. If the mariner has a valid prescription, it must be provided to the MRO, who will then determine if the prescription is valid. If a legitimate medical explanation is established, the MRO will report the result to the marine employer as a negative. If not, the MRO will report the result as positive. Additional guidance can be found at <https://www.transportation.gov/odapc/frpubs>.

## **SIGN UP FOR M.E.B.A. VACATION PLAN DIRECT DEPOSIT**

Designed for convenience, M.E.B.A. members can help themselves by taking advantage of the Vacation Plan Direct Deposit that will help save them time and ease Plans processing costs. Authorization forms are available from the Plans Office, Plans Outport Offices and at the Plans' website – [www.mebaplans.org](http://www.mebaplans.org) (Forms & Documents, Vacation Plan Forms). Complete details are available on the Plans' site as well. Contact (800) 811-6322 or [vacation@mebaplans.org](mailto:vacation@mebaplans.org) for more info.

## **REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS**

Monday, February 5 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;

Tuesday, February 6 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;

Wednesday, February 7 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

Thursday, February 8 – L.A.@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

Friday, February 9 – 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 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)*