

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"



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In this issue//NMS Back on Track after Years of Delay//Tug Captains say they are Being Targeted by Canal Authority//Yet Another Piracy Alert//BLS Report on Union Membership, But There's More to the Story Says AFL-CIO//IMO: "Relatively Smooth" Transition to New Sulfur Limit//Update Your Contact Info with HQ//Payment Portal for Dues, PAF, G&W//Bring Shot Records Onboard//

NATIONAL MARITIME STRATEGY BACK ON TRACK AFTER YEARS-LONG DELAYS, GAO SAYS

In a report issued earlier this week, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said the Maritime Administration's long-awaited National Maritime Strategy (NMS) is finally nearing daylight after years of delay. GAO reported that MarAd anticipates the unveiling of the NMS next month, in time to meet the Congressionally-mandated deadline. As envisioned, the NMS would offer a path forward to improve the competitiveness of the U.S.-flag fleet to meet the nation's economic and defense needs.

The Strategy was originally expected in 2015 but the multi-faceted plan eventually became trapped in limbo at the Office of Management and Budget. Following the 2016 Presidential election, a series of additional delays hindered its release. The Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act then extended the deadline for NMS submission to February 2020. When Admiral Buzby took over MarAd, in 2017 he told Congress that he planned to resurrect the dormant plan and "get it across the finish line."

GAO notes that MarAd has recently been able to navigate past red tape that has stymied the release of the report and should be able to meet the February 2020 deadline. The report can be viewed at www.gao.gov/assets/710/703892.pdf

ALLEGATIONS THAT PANAMANIAN TUG CAPTAINS ARE BEING TARGETED BY CANAL OFFICIALS

A Panamanian tug union affiliated with the MM&P and Nautilus Federation is accusing Panama Canal officials of a targeting campaign against them stemming from their outspoken safety concerns.

Union de Capitanes y Oficiales de Cubierta (UCOC), a Panama Canal union representing tugboat captains, says its members are being targeted by the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) (the Government agency responsible for Canal operations) for speaking up about serious safety concerns over fatigue at the expanded Canal. M.E.B.A. affiliate Union de Ingenieros Marinos (UIM), which represents Canal engineers, shares many of the same concerns about Canal Authority cost-saving shortcuts that compromise worker safety.

The tug captains say the ACP shortcuts have proliferated fatigue issues leading to a rise in reported and unreported casualties at the new locks, including the death of one tugboat worker from head

injuries during line handling procedures. UCOC says the ACP has pursued a campaign to destroy the union, including falsely blaming its members for non-existent delays to traffic through the Canal and orchestrating a media campaign against its members.

The tug captains' concerns were amplified in a statement released by the Nautilus Federation which represents international mariners and shipping professionals, including the M.E.B.A. and UCOC. The Federation spotlights officer issues such as criminalization, fatigue, and the impact of automation.

Nautilus Federation reiterated that the widening of the Panama Canal led to increased ship traffic, including the Neopanamax vessels that require enhanced tugboat support. Though overall vessel traffic shot up, the Authority failed to deploy additional tugboats and even decreased personnel necessitating crews to work more hours under more difficult conditions than before Canal expansion.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) stated in a report that ACP has a safety culture that 'degrades safety'. It made several recommendations to the Government of Panama to maintain a minimal level of safety in Panama Canal operations, and to reduce the risk to the health of its tugboat operators. ACP senior management was later changed-out but UCOC says the persecution of its members continues. Over a dozen captains were suspended or disciplined for protesting against working conditions and ongoing retribution has helped thin the amount of dissent from mariners who fear additional reprisals.

UCOC wants the Authority to introduce written hours of service rules that govern tug captain scheduling and an upper limit to the number of continuous hours tugboat captains can work. If it fails to do so, casualties due to tug captain fatigue will continue, they say.

YET ANOTHER PIRACY ALERT ISSUED

The Maritime Administration has issued another piracy alert, this one warning about increased criminal acts in the Sulu and Celebes Seas. Last year, there were at least 12 reported boardings, attempted boardings, attacks, hijackings, and kidnappings in that area. Kidnapping incidents were reportedly linked to the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), a violent Islamic separatist group operating in the southern Philippines.

U.S. flagged vessels transiting the affected areas were advised to remain vigilant and adhere to the counter-piracy annex of their approved Vessel Security Plan. Questions about this and other advisories can be forwarded to GMCC@uscg.mil and you can visit <https://go.usa.gov/xETEA> for more.

BLS ISSUES REPORT ON UNION MEMBERSHIP, BUT LABOR FEDERATION SAYS STATS DON'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the nationwide union membership rate slipped to 10.3% last year, covering about 14.6 million workers, the lowest number since BLS began computing such data in 1983. The rate was 10.5% in 2018. In 1983, it was at 20.1% with about 17.7 million union workers.

The AFL-CIO acknowledged the numbers but said they don't tell the whole story. "The numbers reflect both the tremendously difficult barriers workers seeking to form a union continue to face and the unmatched resilience of working people in our desire to win bargaining power on the job."

They cited the many victories union workers have racked up in recent years with the activism displayed by unionized workers across the country who demanded respect in the workplace and won increased pay and benefits, as well as improved conditions. The UAW, teachers unions, CWA members in the Southeast and UFCW workers in the Northeast, among others, all recently fought and won hard-earned victories.

They also noted that public approval of unions continued to rise in 2019, reaching a nearly 50-year high. This comes at a time when union activists in unorganized workplaces are gaining momentum, specifically in the hospitality, electric bus manufacturing, technology, video games and media industries.

“And all of this forward progress is despite a federal government that is actively making it harder to form a union,” they noted. “A highly politicized National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is abandoning its mission to uphold and protect workers' right to form unions and bargain collectively, as employers are violating the law in more than 40% of all union election campaigns. This comes on the heels of the Janus decision allowing workers a free ride to be covered by union protections without paying dues, throwing out 40 years of legal precedent in an effort to undermine collective bargaining in the public sector. Despite these unprecedented attacks, many of the AFL-CIO’s public sector unions still grew in 2019.”

“RELATIVELY SMOOTH” TRANSITION TO NEW SULFUR LIMITS, SAYS IMO

International Maritime Organization Secretary-General Kitack Lim announced that the global shipping industry, so far, has transitioned well to new sulfur limits that came into effect on January 1. Beginning on New Year’s Day 2020, the sulfur content of fuel oil used by internationally-trading vessels operating outside designated emission control areas cannot exceed 0.50% - representing an 80% cut from the former 3.50% limit. Ships without scrubbers meet the requirement by burning costlier low-sulfur fuels.

Secretary-General Lim noted that indications show that it has been a “relatively smooth transition” to the new limit. Initial pricing for compliant fuels soared, he said, but have been stabilizing in recent days.

Next up, March 1 marks the onset of the “carriage ban” when vessels (without scrubbers) will be prohibited from carrying non-compliant fuel oils. Lim thanked the industry for their efforts so far, and implored them for continued cooperation “to ensure IMO 2020 is implemented properly.”

UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO WITH HQ

Be sure to inform Headquarters if you have updated your contact information. The Membership Update Form on our website will help expedite the process. It can be found at www.mebaunion.org under the “Members” tab or in the “Documents & Notices” section. Alternatively, you can send your updated information to Renee Bowman at HQ by mail, fax at (202) 638-5369, or e-mail at membership@mebaunion.org Since the M.E.B.A. Plans office in Baltimore and Headquarters databases are NOT linked, you must also forward a signed change of address form to the Plans Office if you wish to update your information with them.

PAYMENT PORTAL FOR DUES, P.A.F., G&W

The payment portal accessed from M.E.B.A.’s homepage (www.mebaunion.org) allows members and applicants ease when making a dues or service charge payment and to assist the P.A.F. and Good &

Welfare funds. Payments can be made by credit card, debit card or through a checking account. A recurring payment option is also available on the portal enabling automatic quarterly payments so members can “set it and forget it” and always stay current. You simply check the “Recurring Billing” box that appears at the top of the page when you’re filling out your information to enable automatic quarterly payments. This feature is also available to support the Good & Welfare and the Political Action Fund on a monthly basis. P.A.F. is crucial for keeping U.S. shipping and the Union’s interests viable in the halls of Congress.

REMEMBER TO BRING SHOT RECORDS ONBOARD

Mariners are reminded to keep their vaccination records with them when sailing – especially when shipping onboard MSC-contracted vessels. If unsure what is required, it is a good idea to check with an M.E.B.A. clinic.

REGULAR MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Monday, February 3 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;
Tuesday, February 4 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;
Wednesday, February 5 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;
Thursday, February 6 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;
Friday, February 7 – 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. 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.