

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"



M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

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ALERT TO U.S.-FLAG SHIPPING NEAR IRAN CONTINUES

At press time, there was a hiatus in the heated rhetoric being traded between the U.S. and Iran following an exchange of firepower in recent days. But a maritime alert issued earlier in the week by the Maritime Administration in deference to U.S.-flag shipping in the waters near Iran remains in full effect.

In the past year, commercial shipping in the region has been subject to GPS interference, spoofing, ship seizures and vessel attacks with explosives.

MarAd advised U.S. commercial vessels to exercise caution and coordinate vessel voyage planning for transits of the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Red Sea with Naval Co-operation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) and follow NCAGS's recommendations and guidance whenever possible.

M.E.B.A. continues to keep in close contact with our shipping companies and ship crews are prepared as always. We have received reports that: many U.S.-flag vessels conducted successful tests of their communications protocol with CENTCOM/Bahrain, vessels have implemented routing that take them as far off the Iranian coast as possible; and coordination continues with US Navy Command/Bahrain by company. The Command is fully aware of U.S.-flag vessel routing and ports of call. The Command continues to explore all options in the event of any threats and/or activity, and the Companies are monitoring the situation closely.

Members should review the War Risk language that is applicable in the contract they work under and any questions should be directed to a Union official.

OAKLAND ALLIANCE AIRS CONCERNS ABOUT PROPOSED BASEBALL STADIUM

Oakland area transport unions and businesses continue to oppose an effort to build a new 35,000 seat Oakland A's baseball stadium along with a hotel and housing developments in the old Charles Howard Terminal. Maritime interests believe the new stadium, built in an already overworked traffic area, would prove detrimental to public safety, present transportation conflicts and injure smooth vessel operations, among other issues. The East Oakland Stadium Alliance, that includes M.E.B.A., MM&P, ILWU, IBU and many others, penned a letter to Major League Baseball that they would be committing an error if they proceed with the move.

The coalition cited a recent study pointing out that a Howard Terminal move would put 27,000 port-related jobs at risk and would be fraught with “numerous transportation, land use, and maritime conflicts with the project.” Maritime interests also fear that blinding lights from the stadium could upset safe vessel transport and help obscure navigation aids. Recreational boaters attracted by the stadium would also prove to be additional obstacles to ship traffic.

The Alliance pleaded with the baseball commissioner to urge the parties to focus instead on building a modern ballpark at the old Coliseum site in East Oakland which already possesses the necessary transportation logistics network that the proposed site lacks. The full text of the letter is available to read on the M.E.B.A. website accessed at www.mcbaunion.org.

WATSON-CLASS LMSR BIDDING PROCESS UNDERWAY

The Military Sealift Command is in the process of soliciting bids from ship managers for the operation of the eight Watson-class LMSRs. MSC plans to hold discussions with eligible bidders this month.

Patriot Contract Services has served as the ship manager for the eight Watson-class LMSRs since 2014. The vessels include the USNS WATSON, USNS SISLER, USNS DAHL, USNS RED CLOUD, USNS CHARLTON, USNS WATKINS, USNS POMEROY and USNS SODERMAN.

RESTORATION OF AMHS FUNDING URGED

“Friends of the Alaska Marine Highway System” have launched a new website promoting the benefits of the Last Frontier’s ferry system and urging the Alaska legislature to restore funding for the critical transportation network. The Alaska Legislature will meet this month and it’s important that State lawmakers are made aware of the desire for a fully functioning ferry system.

Last year, massive State budget cuts majorly impacted ferry fleet operations leading to diminished service for Alaskans, many who live in remote locations and depend on the AMHS. The ferry fleet serves as a crucial connector for Alaskan communities spread out over 3,100 miles.

The site - www.FriendsofAMHS.org – catalogs the latest news and developments at AMHS and urges residents to contact their lawmakers to restore funding. Check out the website for more. They can also be emailed at FriendsAMHS@yahoo.com or reached by phone at (907) 419-7113.

FEDERAL GRANT WILL ASSIST WSF FERRY CONVERSION

Washington State Ferries received good news last week with the announcement that Federal money will assist the system’s goal of reducing the fleet’s carbon footprint. It was recently announced that \$7.5 million in Government grants have been awarded to marine highway projects in nine different states. Of particular interest, the WSF won a \$1.5 million Maritime Administration grant to support the conversion of one of the ferries on the Seattle-Bainbridge run from diesel fuel to hybrid-electric propulsion.

The Jumbo Mark II ferries used on the Seattle-Bainbridge run include the TACOMA, WENATCHEE and the PUYALLUP. It is believed the PUYALLUP will be the beneficiary of the grant money. However, it appears the State will move ahead on conversion of each of the Jumbo Mark II ferries on an undetermined timeline as money was secured on the State level last year that will assist in that process.

WSF said the three vessels account for 26% of the fleet's total fuel consumption. The timing for conversion was said to be good. WSF stated that the vessels (built 1997-1999) are due for their 20-year propulsion system replacements and these would be "easy" upgrades that would have "minimal impacts on service."

Furthermore, WSF believes the upgrades could significantly extend the life of the vessels, improve engine reliability and save up to \$14 million a year on ferry operating costs. They believe once completed, overall fleet carbon emissions could be reduced by 25%.

COAST GUARD REMINDER TO TERMINALS ON UNLOCKING SEAFARER ACCESS

The Coast Guard issued a recent reminder to ensure terminal facilities comply with recently-passed regulations that help improve marine terminal access for seafarers.

Though most terminals are already in compliance, the regs compel inflexible Coast Guard-regulated facilities that have maintained stringent access rules, to conform to more inclusive guidelines. This national policy easing cumbersome, inflexible marine terminal access issues for seafarers - at no cost to the mariner - became effective in May of 2019. Compliance with the rule begins on June 1, 2020. It ensures that no facility owner or operator denies or makes it impractical for seafarers or other individuals to transit through a facility. Previously, marine terminals and individual states dictated their own rules of access creating unnecessary barriers essentially limiting terminal access for many individuals. Approximately 2,500 facilities nationwide are affected by these requirements.

The Coast Guard reminder notice detailed a series of steps for terminals to complete for compliance including: Terminal access procedures must be documented in the Facility Security Plan for each facility and approved by the local Captain of the Port; A system for seafarers' shore access must be documented in the Facility Security Plan (FSP) on or before February 3, 2020; The facility owner/operator must implement their Coast Guard approved seafarers' access system by June 1, 2020; Coast Guard enforcement of the Seafarers' Access to Maritime Facilities Final Rule begins June 1, 2020.

Questions related to the regulations can be directed to the Coast Guard's Office of Port and Facility Compliance at HQS-PF-fltr-CG-FAC@uscg.mil.

NAUTILUS HAILS "DOCKERS CLAUSE" AIDING OVERSEAS WORKERS

Nautilus International put out a celebratory press release hailing the advent of the new "Dockers Clause" that went into effect on January 1 in Europe and Canada. Nautilus International is a trade union and professional organization serving, supporting and protecting the interests of more than 22,000 maritime professionals around the world.

Designed to protect the jobs of dockers – the clause equally protects seafarers from working in unsafe conditions by setting out what maritime professionals should and not do in port. It is considered vital to ensuring sufficient rest and recuperation in the face of increasing pressure on ships' crews.

Nautilus General Secretary Mark Dickinson said, "The new dockers clause will ensure that only dockers do cargo work and lashing, leaving seafarers to undertake their duties onboard. Seafarers can already be required to work up to 91 hours a week - often leaving them fatigued, stressed and putting pressure on their mental health. To also require them to do work which should only be undertaken by trained and experienced dockers puts them at great risk."

The updated ‘dockers clause’ applies to companies with an agreement negotiated through the International Bargaining Forum – a joint forum which includes the International Maritime Employers’ Council and the International Transport Workers Federation.

LAKE CARRIERS PLEASED THAT NEW SOO LOCK IS ‘A GO’

The Lake Carriers expressed relief and elation that a funding bill that includes \$75 million for the construction of a new Soo Lock has been signed into law. LCA, represents 13 companies that operate vessels on the Great Lakes including M.E.B.A.-contracted Interlake Steamship Company

Four parallel locks on the St. Marys River make up the Soo Locks, which enable vessel traffic between Lake Superior and the lower Great Lakes. The MacArthur Lock is the youngest of the four Soo locks. It was built in 1946. The Poe Lock dates back to 1896.

“We can now definitively say that there will be a new Soo Lock,” said LCA President Jim Weakley. In addition to the \$75.33 million for the next phase of the construction of the new large lock in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, Congress has directed the Army Corps to allocate at least an additional \$50 million to continue construction of new coastal navigation lock infrastructure and bridges, including the new lock at the Soo.

This comes on top of \$52 million provided by the State of Michigan in 2018 and \$32 million from the Corps’ 2019 discretionary work plan funds that gave a kick start to construction and finalizing design. LCA says that with continued efficient funding, the construction of the new lock could be complete in as little as seven years.

REGULAR MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Monday, January 6 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;

Tuesday, January 7 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;

Wednesday, January 8 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

Thursday, January 9 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

Friday, January 10 – 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.