

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

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



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

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### **CORONAVIRUS UPDATE**

The effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak continue to hit home as quickly moving developments this week gave way to widespread efforts to minimize the reach of the disease. The World Health Organization has now declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. As testing becomes more prevalent, so does the discovery of new cases leading to an ever-growing list of postponements and cancellations including schools, sports leagues and tournaments as well as large gatherings. This week, several public figures were diagnosed including actor Tom Hanks and his wife Rita Wilson, at least two NBA players and Port of NY/NJ Director Head Rick Cotton, among others. Capitol Hill has now been permeated, as a Senate staffer in the office of Sen. Maria Cantwell (WA) tested positive. Congress has implemented new policies, are restricting visitors and are considering extending their upcoming spring break. The death toll and number of infected are sadly expected to significantly escalate.

Experts say COVID-19 is 10 times more lethal than the seasonal flu, made worse since humans have not built up immunity to this new virus. There is no vaccine and one could take months or years to arrive. Right now, containment is the best strategy and experts are advising people to change their habits to minimize the reach of the virus.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) says that COVID-19 sufferers may exhibit symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath within 2-14 days after exposure. Among other precautions, they ask people to stress good hygiene practices, wash their hands frequently and to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.

The CDC has updated their Interim Guidance for Ships on Managing Suspected Coronavirus Disease 2019 (see <https://go.usa.gov/xdfyG>) and Cruise Ship Travel to Asia (see <https://go.usa.gov/xdfVP>). The Coast Guard has issued a Marine Safety Information Bulletin that is available on the M.E.B.A. website accessed at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org) along with many other relevant documents and guidance.

At least, the situation appears to be gradually improving in China following widespread draconian measures to attack the virus. This week, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Wuhan, the source city of the disease, on a propaganda tour to champion the government's efforts in curtailing the COVID-19 spread. China instituted mass closures and quarantined nearly 60 million people.

American President Lines said that manufacturing and logistics activities in mainland China appear to be settling down and APL offices there are beginning to reopen. "Major coastal ports are now

operating at normal productivity levels,” the APL statement noted. “With truck power coming back on, cargo backlogs are quickly clearing out, thereby returning fluidity to container movements.”

China has suffered almost 81,000 infections with nearly 3,200 deaths from the virus that has gravitated to about 116 countries around the world. Italy, already in the throes of a restrictive travel ban, announced that at least 168 people there died of the virus within a 24-hour period.

### **CAA REUNION CANCELED**

The Calhoun Alumni Association has regretfully announced that due to the continued growth and spread of the COVID-19 virus, the planned upcoming CAA reunion that had been scheduled for June 26-28, 2020 has been canceled.

In making the decision, organizers took into consideration the health and safety of our members and retirees – many who would be traveling a great distance to attend.

Rich Helinski, who had been working hard on this event, expressed his disappointment that a successful reunion is not viable given the increasingly tenuous situation brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. He is eager to renew his efforts once conditions stabilize with the goal of re-launching the CAA Reunion in the summer of 2021.

Rich put out a statement about the cancellation that can be viewed at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School website [www.mebaschool.org](http://www.mebaschool.org)

### **MARITIME CONGRESSIONAL SAIL-IN IS CANCELED**

The Maritime Congressional Sail-In will no longer take place as scheduled on March 25<sup>th</sup> due to the coronavirus situation and new policies in effect on Capitol Hill. The event had been staged every year since 2010.

U.S.-flag shipping interests, including the M.E.B.A., come out in force on Sail-In day to help educate Members of Congress about the importance of U.S.-flag shipping. But the COVID-19 situation has prompted Congress to restrict visitors on Capitol Hill and the possibility of an effective Sail-In became impractical. Sail-In organizers will be looking at dates to schedule a future event.

### **STRATEGIES TO REVITALIZE U.S.-FLAG SHIPPING & STRENGTHEN SEALIFT PROMOTED AT JOINT HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING**

A Congressional hearing spotlighting the need to reinforce the nation’s sealift capabilities (as well as airlift) afforded an opportunity for logistics decisionmakers to defend the necessity of a strong U.S.-flag commercial fleet and a plentiful mariner base. In testimony before the joint Subcommittees on Seapower and Projection Forces, and Readiness, the leader of the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) General Steve Lyons and Maritime Administrator Rear Admiral Mark Buzby both called for strengthening America’s sealift readiness and capability.

Admiral Buzby revisited many of his familiar points – that our nation’s strength and readiness are being challenged by a limited U.S.-flag commercial fleet, an outdated U.S. government-owned fleet, and the shortage of qualified mariners necessary to sustain overseas military operations. Administrator Buzby told lawmakers that his agency’s long-awaited National Maritime Strategy (NMS) is complete and “has been submitted.” Adm. Buzby said the document is entitled “Goals and Objectives for a Stronger Maritime Nation: A Report to Congress” and lists four goals and “about 39 objectives” to

help strengthen the commercial U.S.-flag fleet. He called it “a starting point” that we can “move forward from.”

Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA) chairs the Readiness Subcommittee and was heartened by the forthcoming release of the report. He called for Congress to follow the lead of such overarching strategy recommendations while also endorsing the recent release of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) report calling for the rebuild of systems supporting the U.S. Merchant Marine.

In addition, he took the opportunity to promote a piece of legislation he introduced that could help grow the U.S.-flag fleet and support thousands of new jobs for American mariners. The Energizing American Shipbuilding Act (H.R. 3829/S.2167), introduced in both the House and Senate, would require that fixed percentages of all exported LNG and crude oil would travel on U.S.-built, crewed, and flagged vessels.

Gen. Lyons told Members at the hearing that he “is open to solutions” and doesn’t see outsourcing the organic sealift fleet as an answer. He reaffirmed that the “linkages to the commercial industry are inextricable – both in terms of mariners, in terms of additional capacity and in terms of global network.” But there are challenges in generating sufficient cargo under U.S. flag, he said. He noted that you need the cargo - which influences the number of ships under U.S.-flag - which in turn influences the number of available qualified mariners. He repeated the oft-noted mantra that “cargo is king” and pointed out, “if we have the cargo moving under the U.S.-flag...we’ve got a viable U.S.-flag fleet.”

### **ADVOCATE OF TRANSPORT WORKERS: TTD MARKS 30-YEAR ANNIVERSARY**

Celebrating 30 years of advocacy on behalf of frontline transportation workers, the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), and leaders of its 33 affiliated unions, including the M.E.B.A., met for their winter convention earlier this week in Orlando, FL. M.E.B.A. was represented by President Marshall Ainley, Secretary-Treasurer Bill Van Loo and Government Affairs Director Erick Siahaan.

Addressing the threat of coronavirus (COVID-19), which stands to disproportionately impact transportation workers, TTD’s Executive Committee was briefed on ways to keep the traveling public and frontline workers safe. Labor leaders also recognized the significant impact the virus could have on the broader economy, and vowed to pursue policies that will protect working families and ensure the vitality of middle class jobs in transportation industries and beyond.

Among other initiatives, transportation union leaders pledged to pursue policies that will:

- Improve air quality in commercial aircraft;
- Ensure America’s ports remain a hub of good, middle-class jobs;
- Strengthen America’s maritime and shipbuilding workforces;
- Ensure the Railroad Retirement Board can meet the needs of America’s rail workers;
- Give Transportation Security Officers the same rights as other federal employees;
- Improve railroad grade crossing safety;
- Ensure our nation’s transit workforce can thrive in a changing industry; and
- Create good jobs in electric vehicle manufacturing and infrastructure.

Transportation labor leaders discussed their priorities with Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Democratic Caucus Chairman, and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Ranking Member of the House Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee. TTD's Executive Committee also voted to re-elect Larry Willis as president and Greg Regan as Secretary-Treasurer.

### **CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE JONES ACT**

U.S.-flag shipping has a big anniversary this year, as 2020 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> year of the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, known as the Jones Act. The TTD issued a Policy Statement, unanimously accepted by its 33 affiliated unions, honoring the centennial of the statute which protects U.S.-flag vessels and mariners and reaps huge economic and job creation benefits for the U.S. June 5<sup>th</sup> marks the official 100-year birthday of the Jones Act

The TTD said, "It is rare that any piece of legislation stands as the bedrock of an industry for so long – the Jones Act was passed just a few months after Prohibition, and 15 years before the creation of Social Security. Yet its continued endurance is a testimony to its unparalleled importance to the domestic sectors it supports. Today, it has never been clearer why the Jones Act is necessary and why policy makers' long-held support for it must not waver."

"The Act's requirement for U.S. mariners aboard domestic vessels ensures that our maritime industry can support good paying, safe, and dignified union jobs. It is not hyperbole to say that without the Act, unscrupulous companies will race to replace U.S. workers with foreign and unqualified mariners, forced to work in dangerous conditions with negligible pay. Examples of what this might look like play out daily across the globe, where foreign companies abandoning sick or injured employees in faraway ports is a commonplace occurrence. One hundred years later, the Jones Act remains the single most powerful tool to protect mariners and ensure the continued existence of a domestic maritime workforce."

The full statement was placed on the M.E.B.A. website available at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)

### **UNION PLUS AUTO BUYING SERVICE**

Union Plus programs, which are available to M.E.B.A. members, applicants, retirees and our affiliates, provide a vast range of money-saving benefits and services. The M.E.B.A. is enrolled in dozens of moneysaving U.P. programs ranging from life insurance to auto services discounts.

Beginning this month, union members can take advantage of an additional feature of the Union Plus Auto Buying program. Members will be able to get a quote for a trade in or sale for their used vehicle by entering their license plate, VIN, or make and model information into the Auto Buying website and answering some questions about the vehicle's condition. They will then be given an offer on the spot for their vehicle from a local dealer. Members do not have to sell or trade with the dealer, but can use the service just to get a sense of the value of their current vehicle. The functionality is live on the UP website. Check out the new feature at <https://unionplus.truecar.com/trade/>

Sharon Matthews (OPEIU Local 6) used the Union Plus Auto Buying Service to buy a new union-made car when her old car started giving her trouble during her daily Boston commute. "I can't say enough good things about Union Plus," Matthews says. "They save union members so much money, and their benefits are great."

**REGULAR MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

Monday, April 6 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;  
Tuesday, April 7 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;  
Wednesday, April 8 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;  
Thursday, April 9 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;  
Monday, April 13 – 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 (and to send photos & hot news tips) contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – [marco@mebaunion.org](mailto:marco@mebaunion.org) Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram.*