

# 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"*  
Number 13 – March 27, 2020



In this issue// \$2 Trillion Spending Package Signed// Mariners & Support Network Deemed Essential// MLA: Maritime Labor is Delivering the Goods// Thank You to Mariners// Great Lakes Shipping Season Begins// Hospital Ships Swing into Action// CMES Announces Additional Cancellations// Union is Keeping Members Informed// Industry Notes// West Coast Halls Closed on Tuesday// Note on Membership Meetings//

### **\$2 TRILLION SPENDING PACKAGE APPROVED**

On Friday, the President signed a \$2 trillion economic stimulus package to provide emergency aid to fight the rapidly growing COVID-19 outbreak. It had been passed by Senators 96-0 on Wednesday night and by the House on Friday in a voice vote. The legislation represents the largest spending bill in American history. It includes financial assistance to workers, schools, small businesses, hospitals, airlines, and several impacted entities in the form of grants, loan programs, unemployment insurance, and even direct cash payments. Amid a growing death toll and a volatile stock market, the comprehensive package represents enduring negotiations between the White House and Senate Democrats in last ditch-efforts to mitigate the alarming rate of unemployment claims, supply chain disruptions, and an overburdened health care industry.

Within the expansive package includes \$3.1 million for the Maritime Administration to “prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus” of which \$1 million will be directed to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and \$1 million directed to the state maritime academies, for the same purposes. Additionally, the legislation provides flexibility for ferry operators who receive grants under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to use their funds to support operating expenditures. Lastly, the legislation does not provide a corporate “bail-out” of the foreign-flagged cruise ship industry nor waives the Jones Act for any foreign-flagged vessels. Last week, M.E.B.A. along with several other maritime unions penned a letter to Capitol Hill opposing various efforts to exploit the public health crisis to the advantage of foreign flag companies over the American maritime workforce. A copy of the letter can be found on the M.E.B.A. website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)).

### **MARINERS & SUPPORT NETWORK IDENTIFIED AS ESSENTIAL DURING ONGOING CRISIS**

The Department of Homeland Security has deemed mariners and their logistics networks as “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers” and should stay on the job during the crisis as more states and local governments close businesses and issue shelter-in-place directives.

The Presidential issuance of the updated Coronavirus Guidance for America stated that, “If you work in a critical infrastructure industry, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security ... you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule.”

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) executes DHS responsibilities in this regard and developed the list that was issued on March 19<sup>th</sup>.

The DHS guidance designates “maritime transportation workers – port workers, mariners, equipment operators,” as well as “employees who repair and maintain...marine vessels and the equipment and infrastructure that enables operations that encompass movement of cargo and passengers,” as essential critical infrastructure workers. It also lists “employees supporting or enabling transportation functions, including dispatchers...employees of firms providing services that enable logistics operations,” within the “Transportation & Logistics” category on the list that identifies multiple sectors of the workforce that should remain open during this critical time.

As lock-downs throughout various parts of the country continue, M.E.B.A. Members and Applicants are encouraged to procure letters, either from the Union or their employer, that will allow them to proceed unfettered to or from their place of employment. Members and Applicants can obtain a letter from the Union by contacting their local M.E.B.A. Union official or representative.

### **MARITIME LABOR: DELIVERING THE GOODS 24/7**

*The Maritime Labor Alliance, the five union coalition that includes the M.E.B.A., ARA, IBU, ILWU and the MM&P, issued a reminder that maritime labor, as always, is still on watch and working hard to keep our nation moving forward. Our mariners and dockers, as well as the support network behind them, are laser-focused on keeping the cargo flowing in a safe manner and providing essential supplies that will help gird our nation through this pandemic. Highly skilled maritime union labor has always been there for our country in times of peace and in war and will continue to be relied upon if our nation supports them in turn. The MLA statement, which has also been posted on the M.E.B.A. website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)), follows:*

While much of the economy has shut down or otherwise gone into hibernation as a result of COVID-19, there is one essential United States industry that continues its work uninterrupted and undaunted. That is the maritime industry. The women and men working the docks, ships, tugs, ferries and vessels of all types continue to maintain the flow of essential supplies that sustain our lives. Essential products and commodities are transported by water to keep our communities nourished, industry fueled, and troops overseas provisioned. First responders and essential workers of all kinds commute to work aboard the ferries of our major port cities.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, American maritime labor maintains our logistical lifelines at sea and on the waterfront. In peace and in war, be it torpedoes or the current pandemic, Union labor has always risen to the challenge, gotten the job done and delivered the goods. What does maritime labor require in return? Nothing more than we have ever fought for: safe workplaces, reasonable terms and conditions of employment and the respect and security that all working Americans should have.

Today, at a time when organized labor and collective bargaining rights are under relentless and slanderous attack, we the undersigned organizations write to bring to your attention the fact that Union labor has always made the sacrifices and collective effort necessary to see us through times of national emergency. Today is no different. The women and men loading and discharging cargo and delivering the goods across the waterways of our country and the oceans of the globe are doing their part as they have always done and always will, as long as our nation remains a democracy and respects the rights of working people.

## **THANKING OUR MARINERS**

InterManager, an international trade association for the ship management industry, helped verbalize a sentiment that we should all feel – appreciation for the critical ongoing role of our maritime workforce. As they note, 92% of the world’s goods are transported by ships – food, fuel, medicine – and our mariners’ dedication and perseverance in this pandemic are keeping the supply chains intact and helping to sustain nations through this ongoing crisis.

“Although it may seem that the world – in all its panic – has turned its back on one of the most vital supply chain elements,” the statement says, “we continue to value the work they do for the shipping industry and the personal sacrifices they make in keeping the world ‘business as usual.’”

“It is today that we need to say loud and clear – THANK YOU SEAFARERS. Thank you for continuing with your hard work and for being patient while we sort ourselves out ashore. It is important for seafarers to know that they are not alone. Though it may feel like there are times of complete isolation, there are a multitude of shipping management and international trade associations working hard to support them in any way that they can. We are all here for you.”

## **GREAT LAKES SHIPPING SEASON BEGINS**

Lakers began transiting the Sault Ste. Marie locks on Wednesday as the 2020 Great Lakes shipping season began in the shadow of the ongoing pandemic. Mariners are committed to keeping the cargo coming and making sure the materials that help drive the U.S. economy are delivered. That includes iron ore for steel, stone and cement for construction, grain, coal, sand, and salt.

The Lake Carriers Association (LCA), which represents 13 companies operating Great Lakes vessels including M.E.B.A.-contracted Interlake Steamship Company, said these cargoes are essential to help the nation weather the COVID-19 storm. LCA said that tremendous efforts have been expended to make sure the fleet is equipped and sailing safely with healthy crews as the crisis continues.

“Our first priority is the men and women sailing the vessels,” LCA President Jim Weakley announced. “Our efforts are focused on preparedness, prevention, and response to ensure their safety from the impacts of COVID-19. We’ve tried to anticipate as many contingencies as possible and prescribe the actions to counter them. This is a community effort and the partnerships we have forged are strong. The best plans are comprehensive and nimble.”

## **HOSPITAL SHIPS SWING INTO ACTION**

The Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS MERCY left its berth in San Diego earlier in the week and arrived at the Port of Los Angeles (World Cruise Center, San Pedro) earlier today (3/27). The ship is taking part in coronavirus response efforts and will serve as a referral hospital for non-COVID-19 patients to help free up shore-based hospitals. MERCY is carrying over 800 Navy medical personnel and support staff as well as 70 civilian mariners.

The USNS COMFORT, the Norfolk-based hospital ship that will deploy to New York Harbor, reportedly is preparing to sail as soon as next week after expediting planned vessel maintenance. The COMFORT is currently being loaded up with medical supplies and equipment, including 1,000 hospital beds. Civilian Mariners onboard both vessels are represented by the M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU.

## **CMES INFORMS MEMBERS ABOUT FUTURE CANCELLATIONS**

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School, which is currently in a hiatus after suspending classes in response to the ongoing pandemic, has announced additional near-future class cancellations. The School is cancelling classes through May 1, 2020. Additional class cancellations include Gas Turbine Engineering that would have begun on April 20<sup>th</sup> and the April 27<sup>th</sup> installment of the Instrumentation course.

CMES is following guidance received at the Trustee-level and state and local government directives. Enrolled students have been contacted. The School noted that this is a constantly evolving situation and additional cancellations and changes may need to be made.

## **UNION KEEPS MEMBERSHIP INFORMED ABOUT LATEST DEVELOPMENTS**

In addition to the weekly *Telex Times* and our website, the Union is continuing to keep members informed through communications to our Union halls and offices - as well as by mass emails sent to members, applicants and retirees.

Those communications contain valuable information and developments stemming from the ongoing pandemic and are sent to our membership at their email address on file with Headquarters. If you want to ensure that you are part of the contact list receiving future updates, please visit the M.E.B.A. website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)) and update your contact information using an M.E.B.A. Database Update Form. In addition, M.E.B.A. has the capability to contact members by text message if their cell phone information is accurate and on file with HQ. Please make sure the Union can contact you.

As stated in communications sent to our membership, the M.E.B.A. is making our best attempts to accommodate concerns of all of our members, employees, as well as our employers in this current environment.

## **INDUSTRY NOTES**

Although the maritime industry is working hard to keep our economy moving, it's not without its challenges. Ports, shipping companies and mariners are all adjusting to the crisis with the implementation of new protocols and precautions aimed at delivering the goods as safely and efficiently as possible given the circumstances.

Two terminals at the Port of Houston were temporarily closed last week after a worker tested positive for COVID-19. After the port addressed the situation and was able to establish that safety would not be compromised, the Bayport and Barbours Cut terminals were reopened.

Among an ever-increasing list of restrictions and preventative measures, Honolulu has imposed a mandatory 14-day (home or hotel) quarantine for residents or visitors flying into the state. In addition, the Honolulu Sailors Home Society shuttered their doors and are not accepting any new guests until further notice.

The Navy is dealing with a COVID-19 outbreak on one of its aircraft carriers, the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT. Three sailors were found to be infected and were immediately airlifted off the vessel. However, since then, at least five other crewmembers – among 5,000 sailors aboard, also tested positive. Now the ship has been diverted to Guam where every crewmember will reportedly be evaluated for infection.

The Coast Guard issued a pair of Marine Safety Information Bulletins today that have been posted on the M.E.B.A. website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)). MSIB 10-20 is “COVID-19 – Guidance for Maritime Operators on Compliance with Federal Drug Testing Requirements.” MSIB 11-20 deals with “Maintaining Maritime Commerce and Identification of Essential Maritime Critical Infrastructure Workers.”

### **WEST COAST HALLS CLOSED ON TUESDAY**

West Coast Union halls will be closed on Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup> to observe Cesar Chavez’s birthday. Cesar Chavez was an American farm worker, labor leader and civil rights activist who co-founded the National Farm Workers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers. He was known for his use of non-violent tactics and made the farm workers struggle a moral cause with nationwide support.

### **NOTE ON MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

The April Membership Meetings have been canceled. The formation of a Financial Review Committee that would have taken place at those meetings has been postponed. The Union’s District Executive Committee will make a future determination about the FRC and the May membership meetings.

-----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 (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.*