

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War Since 1875"



M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

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MAERSK TALKS CONTINUE; CONTRACTS EXTENDED

Another round of talks with Maersk Line Ltd. took place today and will continue in Norfolk, VA tomorrow as the Union works toward a new agreement covering members working under three MLL contracts (MLL, E-Ships, and M-Ships). With the contracts due to expire on November 15, the parties agreed to extend them a month to December 15 as negotiations continue.

The parties have scheduled another round of talks at M.E.B.A. HQ on November 8-10 as well as another multi-day bargaining session beginning on November 27.

TTD CLEARS UP JONES ACT "CONFUSION" IN LETTER TO SENATORS

Not one to let ignorance prevail, the Transportation Trades Dept. continues to make efforts to ensure Congress understands the true importance of the Jones Act, not the lies foisted upon the public in the wake of Hurricane Maria. TTD President Larry Willis recently penned a letter to U.S. Senators in a continued effort to clear up misconceptions about the Jones Act that play into the hands of foreign interests. M.E.B.A. is a founding member of the TTD which represents 32 unions in the maritime, aviation, rail, transit, trucking, highway, longshore, and related industries.

Willis pointed out that a repeal of the Act would not result in relief for Puerto Rico, as many uninformed opinions have claimed. Instead, he said, "it would endanger thousands of good-paying jobs, undermine our military's sealift needs, and cede a well-regulated domestic maritime industry to an exploitive international shipping regime with little regard for U.S. interests or basic workers' rights."

He told Senators that following the devastating storm, the anti-Jones Act propaganda thrust upon the public by "those who wish to scrap the law for reasons of ideology and political interest," has sown confusion necessitating an exposition of the facts.

He noted that the two main Jones Act accusations that have been leveled by opponents – that the Act has prevented or delayed relief deliveries and that the Act has helped ruin Puerto Rico's economy – are wrong-headed mistruths.

To date (*and as supported by witnesses at a hearing today before the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee*), there has been no lack of U.S.-flag ships delivering relief aid. It has been the smashed Puerto Rico infrastructure that has helped prevent intra-island distribution of the goods, he noted. He pointed out

that “Labor will support any waiver of the Jones Act” if it is merited when sufficient U.S.-flag capacity isn’t available.

Regarding charges that the Jones Act “is a driving force in Puerto Rico’s 11-year economic crisis,” Willis noted that the non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) looked at this issue and refused to embrace that misguided line of logic. More recently, Willis pointed out, “pricing information submitted to Congress shows Jones Act rates to Puerto Rico are comparable, and sometimes lower, than foreign shipping rates to nearby Caribbean islands. Furthermore, the Jones Act ensures delivery of perishable goods by providing reliable, dedicated service between the mainland and Puerto Rico while foreign ships navigate multi-stop trade routes. According to the GAO, this crucial service is not likely to be replicated by foreign ships if the Jones Act were repealed.”

He noted that scrapping the Jones Act would allow foreign “flag of convenience” ships to muscle in on U.S. trade and jobs, imperil the military’s sealift needs... and “ultimately endanger national defense.” He urged Senators to reject any effort to undercut the Jones Act as Congress continues to sculpt suitable relief packages to aid Puerto Rico and other states and territories hard hit by the recent spate of natural disasters.

DEMOCRATS APPEAL TO LABOR WITH AGENDA FOCUSED ON WORKING FAMILIES

As part of its push to reconnect with labor, the Democrats have released a series of policy papers spotlighting some of their key initiatives. Of interest to those in the labor community are newly published Party proposals calling for measures strengthening the hand of workers. The proposals are part of the “A Better Deal” initiative being bandied around in anticipation of the midterm elections that could shift the balance of power in the halls of Congress. The white paper released on Tuesday spotlighted the Party’s labor platform that would empower workers by strengthening and protecting union rights.

Among the highlights, the platform calls for the dissolution of state laws undermining worker freedoms and provisions to strengthen workers’ right to strike for basic workplace improvements, including higher wages and better working conditions. In addition, the paper emphasizes the importance of beefing up penalties on predatory corporations that violate workers’ rights, and to combat misclassification of workers as supervisors and independent contractors.

Other bullet points from the paper call for creating a mandatory mediation and arbitration process to ensure corporations and newly formed unions reach a first contract; Providing millions of public employees with the freedom to join a union and collectively bargain with their employers; and streamlining NLRB procedures to secure worker freedoms and effectively prevent violations.

The paper noted that the decline in union membership over the last several decades has been accompanied by the biggest increase in income inequality since the Great Depression. In addition, since 2009, 91% of all new wealth has been gobbled up by the top 1% of earners, a disparity that has burdened working families with a rockier path toward affording quality education, housing and secure retirements. The paper notes that ‘A Better Deal’ underscores the need for all Americans to “have a seat at the table and a voice on the job.” “We should be rewarding businesses that do right by their workers,” it notes, “not helping corporations that outsource American jobs, lower wages or take advantage of hardworking Americans.”

ETC LNG REUNION AT SUNY CONFERENCE THIS WEEKEND

Five years after the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam, life was unbearable for those who fought beside their American allies. Seven-year-old Lauren Vuong and her family had no choice but to escape. They left under the cover of night, cramming 62 people into a small wooden boat in a life or death gamble. After 10 days of storms, they were lost at sea and nearly out of food, water and fuel. In June of 1980, in those waning hours of hope, the U.S.-flag, M.E.B.A.-crewed LNG VIRGO spotted and rescued them. For the past 20 years, Vuong had been searching for the crew of the VIRGO.

“We never forgot the compassion that saved our lives. It has always been my parents’ dream to find the captain and crew to thank them. I felt compelled to search for the VIRGO as my own expression of gratitude for the sacrifices my parents made for us,” said Lauren Vuong, now an attorney in San Francisco. “November means Thanksgiving, and what greater thanks can one give than for the gift of life?”

The search will culminate in a long-awaited reunion between her family and some of the crew at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 4, at SUNY Maritime. It will be the first meeting between the Vuongs and the VIRGO crew since their 1980 rescue. The reunion will take place during an exhibit opening at the college’s Maritime Industry Museum at Fort Schuyler. Vuong will also talk to SUNY cadets at 3 p.m. tomorrow (Nov. 3) about her family’s journey to freedom, her assimilation in the United States, and the need for compassion. “The political climate now is very touchy; you can’t say much about immigration or international policy. That’s not the nature of my message,” said Vuong. “My interest is in conveying the human connection between people fleeing for their lives and those who come to their aid. When you find yourself on the other end of the binoculars, where you can make that decision to aid another, you have an enormous power. That’s not an issue of policy. That’s an issue of compassion.”

The VIRGO, carrying liquefied natural gas from Indonesia to Japan, was part of a fleet of eight Energy Transportation Corp (ETC) vessels that, together, carried nearly 2,000 boat people to safety. From the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 until 1995, millions of Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese people attempted to escape a country destroyed by war, burdened by economic sanctions, and engaged in conflicts with neighboring countries. Many fled on overcrowded fishing boats that were subject to storms and pirates, and rarely had enough food or water to keep the passengers alive.

“As a child on that boat, I remember only hunger, thirst and fear. Now that I’m a parent, I appreciate the gravity of the decision my parents had to make to put us on that boat. It’s not the kind of decision you take lightly. It’s life or death and you have one chance at life,” Vuong said. “That one chance might be the crewman at the other end of the binoculars. That connection can be as thin as a thread or it can be the kind of humanity that saves your life. I was the beneficiary of true compassion.”

VACATION BENEFITS – 2017 YEAR-END CLOSING

Apply for Vacation and Port Relief Benefits early to avoid the year-end rush.

- **FILING DEADLINE:** The deadline for issuing checks dated in 2017 in the Outports *and* the Plan Office is Tuesday, December 19, 2017.
- **DIRECT DEPOSIT:** The final Direct Deposit Transfer for 2017 will be made on 12/20/2017 and the funds will be deposited into your bank account on 12/22/2017.

- Any requests for Port Relief and Vacation checks received after 12/19/17 at 5:00 PM will be paid on 1/2/2018.

Any member who requires that his/her check be dated in 2017 must file before this deadline. Remember, Monday December 25, 2017 and Monday January 1, 2018 are holidays and the outports and the Plan Office will be closed. It is always wise to plan ahead, so you should verify your specific outport holiday schedule with the Plan Office Representative.

Split Your Vacation Payments between 2017 and 2018

You can submit an Application for Vacation Pay prior to the end of the year and request that the payment of your vacation benefits be split. Two checks will be issued to you, one in 2017 and a second in 2018. The 12/19/2017 deadline applies to split claims also. The vacation benefits paid in this manner MUST be a **continuous vacation period**. Please contact the Vacation Plan staff in Baltimore at 800-811-6322 or 410-547-9111 if you have any questions.

USNS COMFORT RETURNS TO DOCK IN SAN JUAN

The USNS COMFORT is once again at the pier in San Juan aiding struggling Puerto Ricans after spending nearly three weeks offshore treating patients through a referral system. The Military Sealift Command hospital ship was sent to Puerto Rico to support U.S. disaster relief and humanitarian operations following Hurricane Maria. M.E.B.A. represents the engineers in MSC's Civilian Mariner fleet.

Initially, 90% of the island was knocked off the power grid including all of the island's hospitals which were forced to run off generators. Many of the patients in the battered hospitals needed to be transferred to a more stabilized facility - and the COMFORT's 250 available beds, 12 operating rooms and specialized trauma centers along with an 800-strong embarked medical personnel were a godsend. But the island's internal infrastructure prevented easy travel to the dock and higher-ups decided the ship should be positioned more than 10 nautical miles offshore and receive patients by helicopter and boat tenders through a government-approved referral system. That system has come under scrutiny and Puerto Rico Governor Richard Rosselló indicated the COMFORT has been underutilized due to the island's diminished communications infrastructure and the complex referral process. This week it was announced the referral system was being discarded and the ship was returning to the dock in San Juan.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE QUALIFIED ASSESSOR COURSE ADDED

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School has announced an additional Qualified Assessor Online course following the week-long class that begins tomorrow.

The next course will take place from December 8-15, 2017. It will include a live practical assessment. Proper hardware and software on the student's computer is required. Additional information pertaining to the course and system requirements, along with an application form, may be found on the website - <http://support.cutwater.org/curriculum/qualified-assessor>. The ONLY way to apply for an online course is using this form. Faxed and/or mailed application forms will not be accepted. All inquiries should be directed to support@cutwater.org.

These courses are being made available to both the M.E.B.A. membership as well as commercial customers. As such, everyone will be required to pay for the class(es) prior to admission. Upon

successful completion of the class(es), eligible M.E.B.A. Members will be reimbursed just as if they had taken a course at an approved alternate location. The same reimbursement procedures apply and the Application for Reimbursement form should be completed and submitted as usual. Applications for online courses do not count against the yearly maximum number of classes you are eligible to take physically at CMES.

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 (Forms & Documents, Vacation Plan Forms). Complete details are available on the Plans' site as well. Contact (800) 811-6322 or vacation@mebaplans.org for more info.

FIGHT FOR THE JONES ACT!

The Navy League has made it easy to let your lawmakers know how you feel about the Jones Act which is vital for U.S-flag shipping, American mariners and national security. You can access a ready-made modifiable pro-Jones Act letter at <https://tinyurl.com/JonesActLetter>

With a few clicks, you can help counteract the lies and let your Congressional representation know that we need the Jones Act for a strong America!

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS

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

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

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

Thursday, November 9 – L.A.@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

Friday, November 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 contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – marco@mebaunion.org