

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

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



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

*The Official Union Newsletter*



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### **UNINFORMED OPINIONS AIRED ON JONES ACT**

Well-intended but ill-informed Jones Act opinions were bandied about this week as the national media's focus shifted to the plight of Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria. The hurricane knifed through the heart of the U.S. territory at 155 miles an hour wiping out 80% of the country's crops, robbing Puerto Rico of its power and leaving a major dam on the brink of collapse. Large swaths of the island are inaccessible, much of the country is deprived of drinking water and an inordinate amount of homes and livelihoods have succumbed to Maria's appalling trail of destruction.

As relief and supplies pour into Puerto Rico, there has been no lack of U.S.-flag vessels delivering supplies including food and water, equipment to restore the power grid, building materials as well as FEMA and Red Cross relief cargoes. For that matter, there have been no lack of foreign-flag vessels calling on Puerto Rico traveling from overseas ports. However there have been difficulties in distributing the received aid throughout the country because of inaccessibility and ruined or inadequate infrastructure. Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA), pointed out that "the problem is not that the containers [with relief supplies] are not arriving in Puerto Rico, it's that they're not getting off the dock." In fact, reports out of Puerto Rico this morning confirm that over 10,000 containers have been stacked up at the port in San Juan for days with no immediate answers for their dispersal throughout the country to needed recipients.

But several high-profile talk shows and newspapers, fueled by foreign shipping interests, have forwarded the fiction that the Jones Act may be hampering relief efforts. Many Americans, having heard about the Jones Act for the first time this week, now believe the Jones Act has exacerbated relief efforts while ballooning consumer goods for the average Puerto Rican to exorbitant heights.

This week, eight Congressional Democrats requested that the Department of Homeland Security grant a comprehensive Jones Act waiver for a full year. Unsurprisingly, perennial Jones Act opponent Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) also dispatched a letter to DHS with some choice words about the Jones Act while asking that Puerto Rico be spared from the statute's reach.

As members know, the Jones Act requires that vessels used to transport cargo and passengers between U.S. ports be owned by U.S. citizens, built in U.S. shipyards, and manned by U.S. citizen crews. DHS can grant a waiver when it is in the interest of national defense. The industry has no objections to a limited waiver of the Jones Act in an exceptional situation if U.S.-flag bottoms are not available. However, DHS spokesperson Gregory Moore pointed out this week that there is sufficient U.S.-

flagship capacity and that any limitations to Puerto Ricans receiving shipped supplies involves “port capacity to offload and transit - not vessel availability.”

Nevertheless, this morning, the Jones Act was officially waived for Puerto Rico for a period of ten days. In addition, earlier today, Senators McCain and Mike Lee (R-UT) announced the introduction of a bill to permanently repeal the Jones Act for Puerto Rico. Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-N.Y.), who was born in Puerto Rico, introduced a bill that expands the scope of granting waivers to include humanitarian disasters.

Puerto Rico has not been a fan of the Act and a flawed 2012 study by two of its economists argued that the Jones Act unnecessarily inflated prices. But a near year-long examination into the issue by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) debunked many of the claims in the Puerto Rico report and stated that a repeal would devastate the U.S.-flag fleet and undermine national security. Interestingly, the Virgin Islands, another U.S. territory, is exempt from the Jones Act yet faces much higher consumer prices than Puerto Rico. In addition, an analysis showed that it is “40% more expensive to ship goods from the U.S. mainland on foreign vessels to the U.S. Virgin Islands than on Jones Act vessels to Puerto Rico.”

It is indeed a desperate situation in Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands hit hard hit by the recent spate of storms. In many cases, the kneejerk assumptions by Jones Act neophytes are tied into their desire that people in-need receive immediate aid. But the reality on the ground – and at the Puerto Rican ports – absolves the Jones Act from any blame during this trying time.

### **MSC HOSPITAL SHIP TO ASSIST RELIEF EFFORTS IN PUERTO RICO**

The Military Sealift Command’s massive Hospital ship USNS COMFORT was activated this week and is set to sail for Puerto Rico this weekend to assist relief efforts.

One of two hospital ships in the MSC fleet (the other one is the USNS MERCY) the vessel provides afloat, mobile, acute surgical medical facilities to support U.S. disaster relief and humanitarian operations. M.E.B.A. represents the engineers in MSC’s Civilian Mariner fleet.

The COMFORT has 1,000-beds, 12 operating rooms and specialized trauma centers along with a huge medical staff. Already, at least 16 Navy and Coast Guard vessels are offshore in Puerto Rico with another 10, including COMFORT, set to join.

The USNS COMFORT was built as a San Clemente-class supertanker in 1975 and went to work under M.E.B.A. contract for Apex Marine under the name of ROSE CITY. The MSC converted it into a hospital ship in 1987. Among other missions, the vessel played a large role in Kuwait during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and took part in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. It also provided medical treatment to victims of Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. In 2011, it sailed to Central and South America for a five-month humanitarian mission and performed a six-month 2015 mission in the Caribbean and South America.

### **USNS SPEARHEAD ASSISTING ST. MARTIN**

Expeditionary fast transport vessel USNS SPEARHEAD is at the island of St. Martin to assist in disaster relief efforts for those affected by Hurricane Irma.

SPEARHEAD traveled to the Caribbean nation to support the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, which led humanitarian assistance efforts. Upon arrival at St. Martin, Sailors and civil service mariners offloaded 1,000 meals, ready to eat (MREs) and 81,000 bottles of water from the ship's mission bay, to the pier. St. Martin sustained significant damage after Hurricane Irma passed over the island's landmass. The hurricane struck as a category five storm, causing widespread destruction of the country's infrastructure. Irma was the first major hurricane to hit the island in 22 years. Since her delivery in 2012, SPEARHEAD has been deployed on one high-profile mission after another.

In related SPEARHEAD news, the vessel is finalizing a shipyard period for its drydocking and overhaul. Detyens Shipyards in Charleston, South Carolina will perform the work later this year.

### **UNION PLUS ASSISTANCE FOR THOSE IMPACTED BY IRMA, HARVEY, MARIA**

Members, applicants and retirees in Hurricane disaster-affected areas may be eligible for financial assistance through the Union Plus Disaster Relief Grant program. M.E.B.A.'s connection with Union Plus nets our members a range of benefits and discounts. Union Plus programs, which are available to M.E.B.A. members, retirees and our affiliates, provide a vast range of money-saving benefits and services. The Union is enrolled in dozens of moneysaving U.P. programs ranging from life insurance to financing children's educations.

Union Plus Disaster Relief Grants of \$500 are available to eligible participants of one of the following programs: Union Plus Credit Card Program; Union Plus Life Insurance; Accidental Death Insurance; Union Plus Auto Insurance or Union Plus Mortgage Program. To qualify for a Union Plus Disaster Relief Grant:

1. Your residence must be in a county qualifying for individual assistance money from FEMA (to check if your county or parish has been designated as an area eligible for individual assistance money, visit FEMA's disaster declarations page).
2. You must have experienced a significant loss of income or property within the past six months due to the disaster.
3. You must have had a Union Plus Credit Card for at least three months, Union Plus Mortgage, Union Plus Life or Accidental Death Insurance or Union Plus Auto Insurance for at least 12 months with that account or policy in good standing (be up-to-date on payments). Visit [www.unionplus.org](http://www.unionplus.org) for more.

### **SECURITY AT SEA SPOTLIGHTED AT MARAD-SPONSORED CONFERENCE**

M.E.B.A. took part in an industry conference focused on Maritime Security that explored a variety of issues including piracy, mariner advisories and cybersecurity. M.E.B.A. Secretary-Treasurer Bill Van Loo and Gulf Coast V.P. Erin Bertram were featured on two separate panels at the 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference staged at Texas A&M Maritime Academy in Galveston last week. Van Loo gave a piracy overview including M.E.B.A.'s heroic response onboard the MAERSK ALABAMA and talked about the shifting dynamics of robbery at sea. He discussed mariner training and strongly advocated for U.S.-flag ships as a first line of defense at the nation's ports and harbors. Erin led her panel in a discussion of global security on the high seas, discussed women on the waterfront, touched on training and detailed how the industry has changed over the years including evolving regulatory and licensing requirements.

The one-day conference encompassed a series of valuable industry sessions delving into every aspect influencing mariner safety at sea. M.E.B.A. continues to stay involved with conferences, hearings and working sessions on behalf of our membership and those on the “front lines” serving aboard ship.

### **TANKERMAN DL CLASS ADDED TO 2017 SCHEDULE**

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School announced that due to membership needs, they have added an additional Tankerman DL class to the 2017 schedule. The class is set to run between Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> to Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. Applications may be sent via the CMES website ([www.mebaschool.org](http://www.mebaschool.org)), faxed to (410) 822-7220, or emailed to [applications@mebaschool.org](mailto:applications@mebaschool.org).

### **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](http://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](mailto:vacation@mebaplans.org) for more info.

### **REMEMBER TO UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION WITH HQ**

Be sure to inform Headquarters if you have changed your contact information. There is an address change form on our website to help expedite the process. It can be found at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org) under the “Members” tab or in the “Documents & Notices” section. Alternatively, you can send your updated information to Doris Fitzgerald at HQ by mail, fax at (202) 638-5369, or e-mail at [membership@mebaunion.org](mailto: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.

### **REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS**

Monday, October 2 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;  
Tuesday, October 3 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;  
Wednesday, October 4 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;  
Thursday, October 5 – L.A.@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;  
Friday, October 6 - 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 contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – [marco@mebaunion.org](mailto:marco@mebaunion.org)*