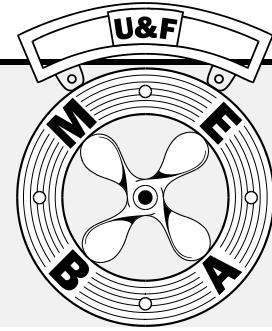


# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

*FEBRUARY 2019*



Rep. Al Green (D-TX) has re-introduced a bill for this 116<sup>th</sup> Congress that would provide surviving WWII merchant mariners with a one-time \$25,000 benefit. The bill carries the same number as it did in the last session of Congress – H.R. 154. Specifically the bill would compensate qualifying individuals who were members of the Merchant Marine between December 7, 1941, and December 31, 1946 (including the Army Transport Service and the Naval Transport Service). The “Honoring Our WWII Merchant Mariners Act,” was referred to the Veterans Affairs Committee.

In addition, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA) have re-introduced companion bills in their respective chambers, collectively honoring World War II merchant mariners with the Congressional Gold Medal.

The bills, S. 133 and H.R. 550 would authorize a gold medal of appropriate design to be awarded to U.S. WWII merchant mariners on behalf of Congress. The medal would be placed in the American Merchant Marine Museum and duplicates would then be struck and made available to the public. Sen. Murkowski’s bill was co-sponsored by Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Angus King (I-ME) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI).

M.E.B.A. Chief Engineer Christian Yuhas, who serves as Vice President of the American Merchant Marine Veterans, said “The time has come for our nation to provide a well-deserved thank you and honor the remaining Merchant Marine Veterans of WWII with a Congressional Gold Medal. This group of unsung heroes nobly served our country by operating the ships that transported critical supplies to front lines of the war, and in doing so suffered a casualty rate higher than any other branch of the military. In fact, one out of every 26 casualties during WWII was a volunteer merchant mariner. America would not be the great nation it is today without their valiant service of yesterday. I urge Congress to support this important bill and recognize this dwindling group of Merchant Marine Veterans from WWII that have served our nation so admirably.”

Merchant mariners were the unsung heroes of WWII. 733 U.S. cargo ships were lost to enemy action and over 8,500 mariners were killed with more than 11,000 wounded. Though the Merchant Marine suffered the highest casualty rate than any service branch during the war, they never received full veteran benefits despite their contributions. It took until 1988, supplemented by efforts from the M.E.B.A. and American Maritime Congress, for WWII mariners to be legally recognized as veterans. They were granted healthcare rights at Veterans Affairs’ hospitals as well as burial flags, but because they weren’t eligible for the original benefits under the G.I. Bill, they did not receive college tuition subsidies, home loan guarantees, pensions, or other provisions. The youngest WWII mariners are now in their 90s. We owe it to them to help recognize our WWII Fourth Arm of Defense and provide them a token of appreciation before the dying of the light.