

# 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 2 – January 14, 2021



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### **MARITIME UNIONS LOOK TO PRIORITIZE VACCINE DISTRIBUTION FOR MARINERS**

The M.E.B.A., along with seven other maritime labor unions, are making efforts to prioritize distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine to U.S. mariners. With the ARA, AMO, IBU, MFOU, MM&P, SIU and SUP, the M.E.B.A. dispatched a letter to National Governors Association Chair Andrew Cuomo and the Chair of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), Dr. Jose Romero, that stresses the importance of quickly inoculating 14,000 American merchant mariners. Mariners are classified as Phase 1(c) "Other Essential Workers – Transportation and Logistics" along with 50 million other workers and following 30 million workers in Phase 1(b). However, the nature of our business makes it possible that our deep-sea mariners scattered around the globe do not fit within "the jurisdiction of any one particular state" and could "fall between the cracks of federal and state efforts to distribute vaccines under the guidelines established by the ACIP."

U.S. mariners are integral to maintaining the nation's economic and military supply lines and COVID-19 outbreaks aboard ship have an oversized effect on vessel operations because of the close proximity of crews and the company's ability to keep a ship in service in such circumstances.

"...Because of the time spent at sea and countries visited by merchant mariners, this workforce is at significant risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19," the letter says. "Further, this community does not have access to appropriate medical care at sea or, at this time, in almost all foreign ports."

The unions offered up a plan to vaccinate mariners quickly involving the Maritime Administration along with the Unions' halls and medical facilities. The letter has been posted on the M.E.B.A. website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)).

### **USNS JOHN LEWIS LAUNCHED; 1<sup>st</sup> VESSEL IN T-AO OILER PROGRAM**

San Diego's NASSCO shipyard launched the 742-foot USNS JOHN LEWIS this week, the first of six vessels in the John Lewis-class fleet oiler program destined to join the Military Sealift Command fleet.

The Lewis-class vessels will provide underway replenishment of fuel and stores to US Navy ships at sea and jet fuel for aircraft assigned to aircraft carriers. M.E.B.A. represents the engineers in MSC's Civilian Mariner fleet.

The yard is making headway on the construction of the next two vessels in the class – the USNS HARVEY MILK honoring the gay rights activist and Navy diver, and the USNS EARL WARREN which pays tribute to the former Supreme Court Chief Justice. The rest of the class will include the USNS ROBERT F. KENNEDY (former Senator and Attorney General), USNS LUCY STONE (19th century abolitionist and suffragist) and USNS SOJOURNER TRUTH (abolitionist and women's rights activist).

The christening of the future USNS JOHN LEWIS (T-AO 205), will be celebrated later in 2021 with the ship's sponsor following the traditional smashing of a champagne bottle on the ship's hull.

### **SOO LOCKS CLOSURE SIGNALS END OF GREAT LAKES SHIPPING SEASON**

As the mercury continues to dip, the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan will close to marine traffic late tomorrow night (1/15) for the season and Great Lakes vessels head toward their winter lay-ups. The Army Corps of Engineers has big maintenance plans for the locks on the Lakes and teams will work through harsh conditions to repair and enhance the locks to prepare for the reopening of the shipping season, scheduled for March 25.

“The first step is to place the bulkheads then our dive team goes into the freezing water to seal the bulkheads and prepare the locks for dewatering,” said Army Corps’ Soo Area office engineer Kevin Sprague. “Most of the maintenance projects will take place on the dewatered Poe Lock, the only lock large enough for the 1,000-foot freighters to transit.”

The team will install temporary panel bridges across the MacArthur and Poe Locks. These panel bridges will provide the ability to mobilize materials and equipment to the job sites throughout the winter closure. Maintenance crews will complete Poe Lock upstream and downstream miter gate structural repair work. The miter gates are the large gates that serve as dams at each end of the lock chamber allowing the water to be raised and lowered in the chamber. One of the intermediate miter gate concrete sills will get major repairs as well. Crews will replace ice flushing valves on the upstream miter gates and make repairs to one of the lock filling valves and one of the lock emptying valves. Crews will also clean the Poe Lock underfloor drainage system. This is important to ensure the lock can be effectively dewatered in the future and goes a long way to minimizing ice buildup on the lock floor while work is being done.

More than 4,500 vessels, carrying up to 80 million tons of cargo, maneuver through the locks annually. Iron ore, coal, wheat and limestone are among the most frequently carried commodities. Opened in 1969, the Poe Lock is 1,200 feet long. The MacArthur Lock was opened in 1943 and is 800 feet long.

The Corps is building a second Poe-sized lock to provide much-needed resiliency in the Great Lakes Navigation System. The second Poe-size lock, 110-feet by 1,200-feet, is being built on the existing Davis and Sabin Locks sites. The Davis Lock opened in 1914, not used since 2018, and only to transport Corps vessels. The Sabin Lock opened in 1918, has been inactive since 1989. Both the Sabin and Davis Locks are too shallow for most modern vessels.

## **MARAD PONDERING FATE OF FORMER NUCLEAR SHIP SAVANNAH**

The Maritime Administration is seeking input and proposals from the public concerning the future of the N/S SAVANNAH, a former commercial nuclear ship in MarAd's care.

The SAVANNAH was the world's first nuclear-powered merchant ship – built to carry cargo and passengers – and was crewed by M.E.B.A. officers back in its heyday in the 1960s. It has been out of service since 1972 and the fuel has been removed. MarAd continues to work on the decommissioning of the ship's reactor. The SAVANNAH was designated a National Historic Landmark and is berthed in Baltimore, MD.

MarAd had intended that the SAVANNAH become a museum ship in some fashion once the power plant is fully decommissioned. However, the agency is seeking input as to alternative proposals keeping in mind the historic significance of the ship. However, the ship's historic status does not preclude its possible dismantling by a ship recycler in the future and that remains a possible option.

They ask for comments to be submitted by March 15, 2021. This is listed as DOT Docket Number MARAD–2020–0133 on the Federal eRulemaking Portal (<http://www.regulations.gov>) The email is Rulemakings.MARAD@dot.gov. For further information contact Erhard Koehler at (202) 680–2066 or via email at [marad.history@dot.gov](mailto:marad.history@dot.gov).

## **LOST JOBS TO COVID DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED WOMEN**

As the coronavirus started spiking this winter, December saw a net loss of 140,000 jobs in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The National Women's Law Center (NWLC) dug deeper into the numbers. It found that while men as a whole saw an increase of 16,000 jobs, women experienced a loss of 156,000 jobs. The study also found that of the 12.1 million jobs that women lost from February to April of last year, more than 40% of these jobs have not returned. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler (IBEW) said on Twitter, "Beyond the headline: Black and Latina women accounted for all net job losses. Women of color have faced an infuriatingly disproportionate economic fallout from COVID-19."

## **CG POLICY LETTER ON MMC ENDORSEMENTS**

The US Coast Guard published CG-MMC Policy Letter 01-21 this week providing guidance for qualifying maritime personnel for the Merchant Mariner Credential (MMC) endorsements in accordance with the STCW Convention for service on vessels. The policy letter is being posted on the M.E.B.A. website and is available from the National Maritime Center. Mariners and other interested parties should contact the Mariner Credentialing Program Policy Division at [MMCPolicy@uscg.mil](mailto:MMCPolicy@uscg.mil) or (202) 372-2357 with any questions or feedback.

## **LAST TWO WEEKS TO APPLY FOR UNION PLUS SCHOLARSHIPS**

M.E.B.A. families have until January 31, 2021 to apply for college education assistance money through Union Plus. M.E.B.A. members, retirees and their families - as well as members of affiliated M.E.B.A. unions - are eligible courtesy of the Union's enrollment in dozens of moneysaving U.P. programs ranging from life insurance to financing children's educations.

Visit [www.unionplus.org/scholarship](http://www.unionplus.org/scholarship) for more. Families of M.E.B.A. members or affiliated members are among past scholarship money recipients. Union Plus Scholarship are granted to students attending a two-year college, four-year college, graduate school or a recognized technical or trade

school. Recipients are selected based on academic ability, social awareness, financial need and appreciation of labor.

Applications can be submitted up until Sunday January 31, 2021, at noon (EST). Those arriving after the deadline will not be considered. The award date is May 31, 2021. During the first week of June 2021, award recipients will be notified. A GPA of 3.0 or higher is recommended. The required essays can account for up to half your total score. Scholarship applicants are judged by a committee of impartial post-secondary educators.

Amounts range from \$500 to \$4,000. These one-time cash awards are for study beginning in the Fall of 2021. Students may re-apply each year. Get the official application and all the details including eligibility criteria by visiting [unionplus.org/scholarship](http://unionplus.org/scholarship) Since 1991, the Union Plus Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$4.5 million to students of union families. Over 3,000 union families have benefited from the program.

### **PIRACY PROLIFERATES IN GULF OF GUINEA; KIDNAPPINGS AT AN ALL TIME HIGH**

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) has reported that the global hotspot for piracy – the Gulf of Guinea - became even more intense in 2020 as the region accounted for over 95% of vessel crews kidnapped around the world.

The IMB's annual report released this week said that 80% of attackers during incidents in the Gulf of Guinea were armed with guns. Crew kidnappings were reported in 25% of vessel attacks in the Gulf of Guinea – more than any other region in the world. 130 crewmembers were kidnapped in the region in 22 separate incidents.

Once kidnapped, crews are typically removed from their vessels and are often held on shore until their release is negotiated. One Gulf of Guinea kidnapping took place almost 200 nautical miles from land with the average kidnapping occurring about 60 NM from land. IMB is advising vessels to remain at least 250 NM from the coast when traversing those waters.

Worldwide, IMB received notice of 195 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships, compared to 162 in 2019. The Singapore Straits have also become increasingly dangerous according to the report as 23 incidents were reported for 2020. Vessels were boarded in 22 of the 23 incidents. Reports of armed robbery at sea in Indonesia remained consistent with 26 reported incidents in 2020 compared to 25 in 2019. Like 2019, there were no reported 2020 incidents of piracy off the coast of Somalia.

### **BURNETT TAKES OVER AT MARAD IN ACTING CAPACITY**

MarAd Chief Counsel Douglas Burnett has taken over as Maritime Administrator in an Acting capacity following the resignation of Rear Admiral Mark Buzby. Adm. Buzby stepped down from the post earlier than planned following last week's breach of the U.S. Capitol Building.

"I no longer believe that I am able to serve as a member of the administration while remaining true to the values which have been the core of my service to the people of our nation," Adm. Buzby said in a statement announcing his resignation. He left the agency on Monday, M.E.B.A. and the other maritime unions had an excellent working relationship with Rear Admiral Buzby and are saddened to see him leave - but grateful for his service.

Burnett spent 30 years with the Navy on active and reserve duty and has practiced maritime law during his long and distinguished professional career.

Adm. Buzby has been a strong voice on behalf of U.S.-flag shipping in his role as the nation's Maritime Administrator since his confirmation to the post in August 2017. Incoming President Biden will nominate his successor at an undetermined future date.

### **NATIONAL MARITIME CYBERSECURITY PLAN RELEASED**

The White House hailed the issuance of its newly released action points to address maritime cybersecurity gaps and vulnerabilities over the next five years. The National Maritime Cybersecurity Plan for the National Strategy for Maritime Security (NSMS) is available to view at <https://tinyurl.com/cyberplan>

The plan identifies how the government can enhance its cybersecurity coordination as well as policies and practices aimed at mitigating risks to the maritime arena. It seeks better information and intelligence sharing, while preserving and increasing the nation's cyber workforce.

National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien praised the newly issued plan saying it "articulates how the United States government can buy down the potential catastrophic risks to our national security and economic prosperity created by technology innovations to strengthen maritime commerce efficiency and reliability."

### **ONLINE FEBRUARY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS – (All times are local)**

*(Registration period to sign up for online meetings runs between January 28 - February 4)*

**Monday, February 8** – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;

**Tuesday, February 9** – CMES@1430 (*CMES Meeting will likely be conducted in-person*); Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;

**Wednesday, February 10** – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

**Thursday, February 11** – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

**Tuesday, February 16** – 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 demonstrated 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; [mehq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mehq@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.*