

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



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

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

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### **FRC COMPLETES REVIEW, FORWARDS REPORT**

A six-person rank-and-file Financial Review Committee spent three days at M.E.B.A. Headquarters this week scrutinizing the Union's financial records for calendar year 2025. The FRC was created as a Democratic safeguard adopted by the M.E.B.A. in the mid-1990s to examine the Union's finances from the previous year.

This year, elected Committee members included Rayomond Collector (Chairman, Houston), Joseph Ajar (NY/NJ), Robert Sundius III (Norfolk), Tim Cogan (Oakland), Chris Schneider (Seattle) and Mike Martykan (Tampa).

The FRC members signed off on a report that will be made available at the halls and voted upon by members at the regular May membership meetings. Many thanks for their hard work this week and for participating in this important democratic process.

### **PATRIOT WINS MSC T-AGOS VESSEL BID**

M.E.B.A. company Patriot Contract Services was the winner of a Military Sealift Command "small-business set-aside" six-ship bid for the management and operation of MSC Ocean Surveillance (T-AGOS) vessels and a Range Instrumentation (T-AGM) ship. The contract includes a 12-month base period with four one-year option periods. Patriot is expected to take over the ships on June 1<sup>st</sup> and crew them up in the days leading up to the turnover though the timeline has not yet been formalized.

T-AGOS ships support Navy antisubmarine warfare operations. The T-AGM Range Instrumentation vessel tracks and monitors missile launches and weapons tests worldwide, while collecting data on these tests. The six vessels that are part of the award include:

- USNS ABLE (T-AGOS - Ocean Surveillance)
- USNS VICTORIOUS (T-AGOS - Ocean Surveillance)
- USNS EFFECTIVE (T-AGOS - Ocean Surveillance)
- USNS LOYAL (T-AGOS - Ocean Surveillance)
- USNS IMPECCABLE (T-AGOS - Ocean Surveillance)
- USNS HOWARD O. LORENZEN (T-AGM - U.S. Air Force Missile Range)

## **KOCH-BACKED GROUP STEPS UP EFFORTS TO REPEAL JONES ACT**

*Bloomberg Government Transportation* is reporting that a major political advocacy organization backed by billionaire Charles Koch is stepping up efforts on Capitol Hill to eliminate the Jones Act, a cornerstone of U.S. maritime policy.

Americans for Prosperity recently disclosed lobbying activity in support of legislation introduced by Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah) that would permanently repeal the cabotage law, which mandates that cargo moved between U.S. ports be carried on U.S.-built, -owned, and -crewed vessels.

A spokesperson for the group contended that repeal of the law would reduce regulatory burdens, bolster energy security, and provide long-term cost relief for consumers. The spokesperson glossed over the fact that repealing the all-American Jones Act would allow foreign interests to swoop in and take over maritime jobs currently reserved for U.S. citizens. The Jones Act continues to enjoy strong, bipartisan support from knowledgeable Congressional Members who view the statute as critical to supporting U.S. mariner jobs and key for the nation's economy and national security.

## **MARITIME INDUSTRY HITS CAPITOL HILL FOR ANNUAL SAIL-IN**

U.S.-flag shipping interests came out in force yesterday on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. as the industry conducted its annual Maritime Congressional "Sail-In." A cross-section of maritime industry representatives, including unions, companies and other organizations helped broadcast the importance of U.S. shipping and solicit support for crucial statutes and programs during 120 House and Senate Congressional meetings – on both sides of the aisle.

M.E.B.A. and AMC officials as well as staffers participated in the all-day affair that helps educate lawmakers about the importance of our industry to the economy and national security and also solidifies support with Members of Congress who already understand and vote the right way. In attendance for the Union were President Adam Vokac, Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha, Atlantic Coast V.P. Jason Callahan, NY/NJ Patrolman Kenny Smith, and Government Affairs Director Erick Siahaan as well as other M.E.B.A. staffers. The American Maritime Congress was represented by President Fair Kim and Government Affairs Manager Caitlyn Tierney as well as AMC intern Nathan Graves.

In cases where the Member of Congress or Senator could not attend a meeting because of a vote or other conflict, a top aide – usually a defense or transportation specialist – would sit in for the lawmaker asking questions and taking copious notes.

Lawmakers were informed about the dire need for increased cargo to help sustain the internationally trading U.S.-flag fleet. They were reminded that their support of the Jones Act, cargo preference laws and the MSP/TSP is crucial. Members of Congress were briefed about the egregious 60-day Jones Act waiver that is in effect until mid-May pointing out that the waiver had no beneficial effect on gas prices. In fact, American jobs are being compromised by the waiver as foreign interests swoop in and take advantage to the detriment of U.S. interests.

Sail-In groups also asked lawmakers to support federal funding to refurbish the decaying infrastructure at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy an 80+ year old facility that is showing its age. Policymakers were also asked to support an initiative to deem certain Coast Guard employees as "essential" to help

alleviate the backlogs occurring at the National Maritime Center due to the funding lapse at the Department of Homeland Security.

As always, you are urged to write a letter or email your Senators and Representatives to ask them to do the right thing for our industry.

### **M.E.B.A. MEMBER ROBERT BINDER HONORED WITH FLEET ENGINEERING AWARD**

M.E.B.A. member Robert A. Binder has been awarded the 2025 Claud A. Jones Award for Fleet Engineering by the American Society of Naval Engineers (ASNE), recognizing his extraordinary achievements supporting the Military Sealift Command's Watson-class LMSR fleet under Patriot Maritime's operating contract.

Binder, who served as both Assistant and Principal Port Engineer for Patriot, was graded as the top-performing Port Engineer for three consecutive years. In that role, he supervised and mentored vessel Chief Engineers and Masters while overseeing operations, maintenance, logistics and lifecycle support for some of the Department of Defense's most important strategic sealift assets. Binder's award citation praised his technical expertise, leadership and commitment to operational readiness.

Among his many accomplishments, Binder maintained USNS RED CLOUD's operational availability at an impressive 97 percent over two continuous years of fully operational service. Through innovative repair planning and rapid-response logistics coordination, he supported multiple critical cargo missions to northern Europe in support of U.S. Transportation Command, the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army prepositioning operations. He also played a key role in returning USNS SISLER to operational service after overseeing the first-ever overhaul and repair of a Watson Class stern cargo ramp. Binder led numerous lifecycle sustainment and modernization initiatives for the Watson Class fleet. Working closely with industry partners including GE Aerospace, he helped secure long-term support for the vessels' LM2500 gas turbine engines following the closure of a longtime service provider. His expanded inspection protocols and fuel nozzle testing program reportedly prevented four potential catastrophic engine failures.

He additionally oversaw a \$26 million overhaul contract for spare LM2500 engines and spearheaded procurement efforts totaling more than \$120 million in critical class spare parts and equipment support. His work also included acquiring rare gas turbine tooling from the Norwegian Navy and directing dozens of configuration upgrades and Transportation Alterations (T-ALTs) designed to extend the Watson Class service life to 50 years. During major shipyard availabilities, Binder managed regulatory drydock and repair contracts valued at more than \$60 million while maintaining strict cost controls. His efforts generated millions in savings that were redirected toward other critical fleet maintenance requirements.

Binder's leadership extended beyond engineering and maintenance. In an era of mariner shortages across the industry, his dedication to crew support, safety and habitability helped RED CLOUD maintain exceptionally low senior officer vacancy rates. He also directed the first prototype Watson Class SMART 3.0 readiness inspection aboard RED CLOUD, earning an exceptional score that established a new benchmark for future Government-Owned/Contractor-Operated vessel inspections.

ASNE's Claud A. Jones Award recognizes exceptional achievement in fleet engineering and operational readiness. Binder's selection highlights both his professional excellence and the critical role M.E.B.A.-represented officers continue to play in supporting the nation's strategic sealift capability. Congratulations!

### **UNIONS OUSTED AT PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD**

The U.S. Department of Defense has moved to terminate collective bargaining agreements covering two unions at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, a decision that labor leaders warn could have immediate consequences for workforce stability and mission readiness. Nathan Proper, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners Local 3073, said his members received abrupt notification that their agreements had been terminated under executive orders issued by Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. Proper said that these types of actions typically involve a lengthy process – but not in this case. He added that the loss of union protections could directly impact the skilled workforce responsible for maintaining critical shipyard infrastructure. “It’s really going to cause material harm to the people who are fixing the machines that are enabling us to execute the mission of national defense,” he said.

The action also affects workers represented by the American Federation of Government Employees, further broadening its reach across the yard. Union representatives emphasized that the now-terminated agreements governed essential workplace standards, including safety protocols, compensation, benefits, and leave policies.

With those agreements no longer in place, labor leaders contend that management will have greater unilateral authority over workplace decisions. Union officials warned that this shift could leave employees without adequate representation on matters directly affecting their livelihoods. A Pentagon spokesperson confirmed the move, stating that the department is implementing Presidential Executive Orders 14251 and 14343 related to the termination of certain collective bargaining agreements. No additional explanation was provided regarding the rationale behind the policy.

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, one of the region's largest employers, plays a vital role in the maintenance and overhaul of the U.S. Navy's submarine fleet. Labor representatives caution that disruptions to workforce conditions could have downstream effects on that mission if not addressed.

### **ALTERNATIVE FUNDING HELPS NMC RESUME SOME STALLED WORK**

While the Department of Homeland Security and Coast Guard are affected by the partial Government shutdown, many National Maritime Center (NMC) civilian staff have returned to work under alternative funding arrangements. As this funding stream is not a full appropriation and the duration of funding is uncertain, some NMC staff have resumed normal operations. Applications for Merchant Mariner Credentials (MMCs), Medical Certificates, and course approvals and related requests will be processed on a first-in/first-out basis. Requests for national security-related expedite requests will continue to be evaluated as they are received.

The Regional Examination Centers (RECs) remain closed to walk-in customers. Mariners who have examination appointments currently scheduled for future dates will be able to test as long as REC staff remain in an exempted status. Upon determination of continued funding availability, mariners with appointments canceled between February 17 and April 18, 2026, will be contacted by the appropriate REC to reschedule those appointments.

NMC measures to mitigate the shutdown are detailed in a recently-released notice available on the NMC site as well as the M.E.B.A. website in the Documents & Member Notices section.

### **SPACE STILL AVAILABLE IN UPCOMING CMES SMALL ARMS COURSE**

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School announced that it has additional space available in its May 4 – 8, 2026 Small Arms class.

Applications can be sent via the CMES website ([www.mebaschool.org](http://www.mebaschool.org)), by fax (410) 822-7220, or by email to [applications@mebaschool.org](mailto:applications@mebaschool.org)

### **CHAVEZ-REMER EXITS LABOR DEPARTMENT**

The White House tapped Deputy Secretary Keith Sonderling as acting Secretary for the Department of Labor on Monday following the sudden departure of Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer. Sonderling is a business-friendly Republican labor policy veteran with deep ties in Washington and Florida political circles. Prior to becoming deputy secretary in 2025, Sonderling served in Trump’s first administration in the Wage and Hour Division before moving to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, where he became known for his work on artificial intelligence and workplace policy.

Several Labor Department officials said Chavez-DeRemer’s extensive travel schedule and limited agency experience allowed Sonderling to assume major operational responsibilities throughout her tenure. It remains unclear whether the White House will nominate Sonderling permanently. In response to Lori Chavez-DeRemer’s resignation as Secretary of Labor, the AFL-CIO noted, “When we’re in a crisis of costs going up, job insecurity due to AI and technology, and uncertainty across the economy, we need a labor secretary who understands working people and will work to make our lives better — not just be a rubber stamp for corporations’ wish lists and gut the protections we count on.”

### **PRESS CONFERENCE RALLIES SHIPS ACT SUPPORT**

Maritime interests took time out yesterday from a busy day on Capitol Hill to cheer on a Congressional press conference at the U.S. Capitol steps drumming up support for a bipartisan piece of legislation aiming to revitalize the U.S. shipping industry. The Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security (SHIPS) for America Act aims to address critical shortfalls in our nation’s maritime and shipbuilding sectors that have been neglected too long. Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA), Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee; Congressman Trent Kelly (R-MS), Chairman of the House Armed Services Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, Matt Paxton, President of the Shipbuilders Council of America, and Brian Schoeneman, Chairman of USA Maritime, headlined the press conference to bring renewed attention to the legislation emphasizing U.S.-flag shipping and shipbuilding as essential elements of our national security strategy.

Congressman Kelly said, “We are a great nation because we are a great maritime nation. But for years, we’ve fallen behind in providing the maritime industry with the resources it needs. If we want to restore America’s maritime strength, it will take robust investment in our shipbuilding industry in both military and commercial. We need to put more American-built ships in the water — ships that carry goods, support our economy, and strengthen our security. We also must maintain those ships and

ensure we have the workforce to crew and support U.S.-flagged vessels with American workers,” he said.

“The SHIPS for America Act represents the most meaningful maritime legislation in the last half century or more,” said Brian Schoeneman, Chair of USA Maritime. “The critical need for a vibrant U.S. Merchant Marine and a revitalized American maritime industry is on display daily. We can’t afford to wait any longer. It’s time to get it done.”

**NEXT MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS** *(All times are local)*

Monday, May 4 – **Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

Tuesday, May 5 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;**

Wednesday, May 6 – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org)**

Thursday, May 7 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

Friday, May 8 – **Honolulu@1100**

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***M.E.B.A. does not tolerate assault, or harassment of any kind.  
If you see something, say something – The M.E.B.A. Emergency Hotline  
can be reached at 1-888-519-0018.***

*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; [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org). Website: [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org) 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. The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School can be contacted at (410) 822-9600 or [www.mebaschool.org](http://www.mebaschool.org). M.E.B.A. Plans is at (410) 547-9111 or [www.mebaplans.org](http://www.mebaplans.org)*