

# 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 51 – December 22, 2022



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## **OSG BRINGING U.S.-FLAG TANKER INTO FLEET**

OSG Ship Management has jobs on the board for qualified members and applicants for a tanker the company plans to bring into the U.S.-flag fleet. The 29,708 gross tonnage chemical/oil products tanker OVERSEAS SUN COAST, built in 2019, is currently sailing in the OSG international fleet.

The 183-meter, 50,000 DWT tanker was constructed at Hyundai Mipo Dockyard and is fitted with an exhaust gas cleaning system. The company will hoist the Stars and Stripes above the vessel in a few weeks with expert M.E.B.A. engineers aboard. Check the jobs board for open positions. The SUN COAST will begin operating under the U.S.-flag in January.

## **M.E.B.A. WORKS ON MARINER ISSUES WITH MERPAC**

This week, the M.E.B.A. met with officials from the Maritime Administration and National Maritime Center under the auspices of the National Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee (NMERPAC) on issues important to mariners. The Union's Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha and Government Fleet Rep./Norfolk Branch Agent Jack Menendez took part in Washington D.C. discussions with officials that touched on a number of topics including the need to remove obstacles and better improve the mariner credentialing process. Another discussion point was an M.E.B.A.-led initiative to expand the mariner pyramid onboard ships to include more junior officers to help accelerate their advancement toward higher licensed titles. Among many other issues, the parties also discussed seafarer tax relief and a proposal to establish a system where mariners collect sea time for relevant continuing education courses.

NMERPAC works on matters relating to personnel in the U.S. Merchant Marine including training, qualifications, certification, documentation, and fitness of mariners.

The Committee is still seeking a licensed Chief Engineer to serve as a representative for Merchant Marine engineering officers. Those interested need to submit an application (including a cover letter, résumé, and brief biography) as detailed in the federal register notice available online at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/12/02/2022-26223/national-merchant-marine-personnel-advisory-committee-vacancy>, by January 3, 2023. Interested applicants should contact Ms. Megan Johns Henry at (202) 372-1255 or [megan.c.johns@uscg.mil](mailto:megan.c.johns@uscg.mil) with any questions or to apply.

## **M.E.B.A. PART OF PUSH FOR UNION DUES TAX DEDUCTION**

The M.E.B.A. along with 50 other national labor unions is urging Congress to reinstate a federal income tax deduction for workers' union dues. The unions noted that the Tax Fairness for Workers Act (H.R. 2549/S. 1157) "would deliver direct cash tax benefits to millions of middle-class Americans, help increase union membership, and strengthen labor unions' capacity to negotiate for increased wages, better benefits and safer healthier workplaces."

The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act eliminated the longstanding tax benefit for unreimbursed workplace expenses. This bill has some bipartisan support but still faces an uphill climb. The unions noted, "This policy would further boost burgeoning community-based worker organizing efforts at a time when Americans overwhelmingly approve of labor unions and union activity is rapidly rising...Americans appreciate that union members working collectively will deliver higher wages, lifesaving benefits, safer working conditions, job security, dignity and respect. Enacting this tax benefit also will deliver significant indirect benefits to non-union workers. Quite simply, the rising tide of union power lifts all workers."

## **UNION MEETS WITH NOAA**

The Union hosted NOAA Rear Admiral Chad M. Cary and agency Legislative Affairs expert Alexis Gutierrez at M.E.B.A. Headquarters on Wednesday to discuss a number of important topics. Rear Admiral Cary is the deputy director of operations for NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation as well as deputy director of the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps.

M.E.B.A. represents engine officers aboard the 15 NOAA research vessels that conduct a variety of scientific missions. The NOAA fleet collects data critical for nautical charts, fishery quotas, exploration of the nation's 4.3-million-square-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, storm surge modeling and climate research.

M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac, Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha, Government Fleet Rep./Norfolk Branch Agent Jack Menendez and Govt. Affairs Director Erick Siahaan spent the productive meeting with the NOAA reps on such topics as the ongoing mariner shortage, retention and recruitment issues, and continued work on further improving the NOAA fleet. The Rear Admiral talked about the ongoing recapitalization and expansion of the NOAA fleet among other things. He was very receptive to the Union's ideas and initiatives and made clear that M.E.B.A. will continue to play a vital role for NOAA well into the future.

## **BILL WOULD CLOSE FEDERAL AGENCY JONES ACT LOOPHOLES**

U.S.-flag shipping champion Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA-3) has introduced legislation that would close loopholes used by federal agencies to circumvent the Jones Act. Rep. Garamendi says his bill, H.R. 9548 - the "Close Agency Loopholes to the Jones Act," - would end nearly 50 years of loopholes that disadvantage American workers - known as "letter rulings." The legislation would repeal all the anti-Jones Act decisions made by U.S. Customs and Border Protection since 1972.

He said, "For nearly 50 years, Congress has stood on the sidelines while federal regulators made bad decisions that erode crucial protections for the American worker. The U.S. government should do everything in its power to prevent foreign vessels from paying poverty wages to take jobs from Americans working in our maritime industry. Sadly, it has largely enabled it instead," Rep. Garamendi noted.

“This stops today. My ‘Closing Agency Loopholes to the Jones Act’ would finally force federal regulators to enforce the law as Congress intended when it created the Jones Act in 1920. Passing my legislation means maximizing job opportunities for American mariners, U.S.-flagged vessels, and domestic shipyard workers,” Congressman Garamendi continued.

Among many other provisions, the legislation would: Close the “vessel equipment,” “lifting operations,” and “installation vessel” loopholes, thereby preventing vessels with cranes and similar equipment from moving building materials into place to construct offshore energy development in the United States’ Exclusive Economic Zone at sea from skirting the Jones Act; Close the “paid out, not unladen” loophole, thereby preventing vessels transporting and installing undersea cable between the mainland United States and fixed points like offshore platforms on the Outer Continental Shelf from skirting the Jones Act; Close the “decommissioning” loophole, thereby preventing vessels decommissioning offshore platforms on the Outer Continental Shelf from skirting the Jones Act; Allow Jones Act operators to appeal decisions—known as “letter rulings”—by U.S. Customs and Border Protection that undermine the Jones Act; and subject Customs and Border Protection’s enforcement of the Jones Act to the Congressional Review Act, which applies to nearly all other major national policy and regulatory decisions at federal agencies.

### **MSP, TSP FUNDING IN OMNIBUS, AS LAWMAKERS RACE TO BEAT DEADLINE**

Lawmakers are working against the clock as they look to pass a huge \$1.7 trillion omnibus spending bill for fiscal 2023 before midnight on Friday. Failure to agree on a final package by then, without a continuing resolution, would result in a partial government shutdown.

Among many other provisions, the 4,155-page bill contains more aid for Ukraine’s defense against Russia, billions in relief for U.S. communities recovering from disasters, and \$858 billion in defense funding.

The omnibus fully funds the Maritime Security Program for FY 2023 (\$318 million/\$5.3 million per vessel), the Tanker Security Program (\$60 million), and appropriates \$299 million for the National Labor Relations Board, a \$25 million annual increase after ten years of flat-level funding. It also appropriates a \$30 million increase to enhance NOAA’s Fleet operations and support additional days at sea and a \$20 million increase to support NOAA's Fleet Recapitalization Plan.

The Senate passed the bill earlier today by a 68-29 vote clearing the way for House approval which is expected tomorrow in time to avert the shutdown.

### **USNS COMFORT COMPLETES LATEST MISSION; ALL SAFE AFTER OVERBOARD INCIDENT**

The USNS COMFORT is back at its Norfolk berth after the Military Sealift Command hospital ship wrapped up its participation in the Continuing Promise exercise. The mission was focused on civil-military operations including humanitarian-civil assistance, subject matter expert exchanges, medical, dental, veterinary and engineering support, and disaster response to partner nations.

COMFORT visited Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Dominican Republic, and Haiti during the two-month mission. The exercise was a success but not without drama. On December 12, twelve military personnel and seven civilians returning to the COMFORT after treating patients in Jérémie,

Haiti were dumped into the water after a heavy swell rocked the small boat they were using in preparation for transfer to the COMFORT.

All 19 were pulled back onto the utility boat, where they stayed as a crane lifted them up to the Hospital ship. Two sailors sustained minor injuries but recovered fully and Continuing Promise participation resumed soon after.

Since the inauguration of Continuing Promise in 2007, COMFORT medical teams have treated more than 484,000 patients and conducted more than 7,400 surgeries, including over 800 surgeries during the 2010 earthquake relief mission in Haiti. This was COMFORT's 12<sup>th</sup> Continuing Promise mission conducted in the U.S. Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet area of responsibility.

Civilian Mariners onboard the USNS COMFORT are represented by the M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU.

### **HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON**

The M.E.B.A. wishes all our members, applicants, retirees and their families a Merry Christmas, happy holidays and a prosperous new year. M.E.B.A. halls and offices will close early tomorrow (Friday) and will reopen on Tuesday. Please follow up with your local Union hall concerning holiday closings to make sure you can complete your Union business.

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

**Monday, January 2** – Halls Closed (*New Years Day* Observed)

**Tuesday, January 3** – Boston@1200; CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230; Seattle (Fife)@1300.

**Wednesday, January 4** – Jacksonville@1300; **New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing mebahq@mebaunion.org**

**Thurs. January 5** – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.

**Friday, January 6** – 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). 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.*