

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 7 – February 12, 2026



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FOOD FOR PEACE RESETS UNDER USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) made its first major purchase to provide commodities to developing nations since the Food for Peace program was moved out of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This week, the Department announced an agreement with the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to provide up to \$452 million in Food for Peace assistance in fiscal year 2025. The funding will support U.S. producers by moving American-grown food to people facing hunger worldwide, delivering nearly 211,000 tons of U.S. agricultural commodities to those in need in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Kenya, and Rwanda.

The Food for Peace program's requirement that at least 50% of international food aid cargoes be carried on U.S.-flag ships is vital for the industry and is important to help maintain a pool of qualified American mariners. The program helps feed countries in need while supporting American agriculture and U.S.-flag shipping.

Administration of the Food for Peace program — previously managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development — shifted to the State Department in 2025 following the dismantling of USAID and the layoff of most of its staff. The program was since transferred to the USDA through an interagency agreement with the State Department and the Office of Management and Budget. M.E.B.A. applauded the effort as an important first step taken by the Administration and have long called for the transfer of such food aid programs under USDA, urging Congress to pass H.R. 1207 and S. 525 to permanently transfer Food for Peace to USDA and ensure the long-term stability and success of delivering food aid cargoes abroad to the people around the world who need it most.

U.S. ISSUES UPDATED WARNING FOR SHIPS TRANSITING STRAIT OF HORMUZ

The U.S. government has issued a renewed maritime advisory warning that commercial vessels operating in the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Persian Gulf remain at risk of interference by Iranian forces. The advisory cites a long-standing pattern of Iranian units hailing, boarding, detaining, or seizing commercial ships, sometimes using fast boats or helicopters, with another incident reported last week.

U.S.-flag vessels were advised to comply with international law while avoiding Iranian territorial waters whenever safely possible. If contacted by Iranian forces, ships the Advisory noted that they should identify themselves by name and flag and state they are operating lawfully. Masters were encouraged to decline boarding requests, though crews should not physically resist if a boarding occurs.

The advisory stresses the importance of coordination with U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations office, maintaining AIS transmissions, monitoring VHF Channel 16, and responding to coalition naval calls. Vessels were also reminded to conduct pre-voyage risk assessments and follow U.S. Coast Guard security requirements for high-risk waters. The updated guidance will remain in effect through August 8, 2026, as tensions in the region continue to pose risks to freedom of navigation and commercial shipping.

WOMEN ON THE WATER 2026: LEADERSHIP, POLICY & NETWORKING

This week, more than 120 representatives from across the U.S. maritime community convened in the Washington, D.C. area for the Women on the Water 2026 Conference, an event focused on professional development, policy engagement, and industry-wide networking. Organized by the Great Lakes Maritime Academy (GLMA) in partnership with K&L Gates, the conference combined high-level discussions with a day at the U.S. Capitol, offering participants direct exposure to the legislative processes shaping the future of the U.S. Merchant Marine. The conference underscored the importance of sustained engagement with policymakers to support the Jones Act and ensure continued federal investment in a strong U.S. Merchant Marine.

Former Secretary of Transportation and Labor Elaine Chao was a featured guest who addressed the group with choice words on workforce development, public service, and the enduring importance of maritime policy to national and economic security.

Nicole Greenway, M.E.B.A. Tampa Branch Agent, spoke during the conference, offering insights from the perspective of organized labor. She participated in a panel alongside representatives from AMO and MM&P, discussing the positives of labor unions and the professional impact that union membership has had on their careers. One of the afternoon's most well-attended sessions, "Women in the D.C. Maritime Industry," was moderated by Caitlyn Tierney, Government Affairs Manager of the American Maritime Congress. The panel discussed the wide range of maritime careers available in Washington, including federal agencies, trade associations, law firms, and advocacy organizations.

The policy focus continued with the panel "Changes in Maritime Policy in the Last 10 Years," which examined recent federal efforts to improve workforce retention. Other panels included career lessons learned and the value of mentorship and advocacy within the maritime industry. Notable speakers throughout the conference included Vice Admiral Joanna Nunan, former Superintendent of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, and Congresswoman Emily Randall (D-WA-6).

The conference also featured a series of classroom sessions covering organized labor, mentorship and networking, mariner mental health, maritime safety and policy, and navigating leadership challenges, reinforcing the event's focus on professional growth and community support. Cadets from all seven maritime academies were in attendance and were given the opportunity to learn about the different roles they can play in the industry. Encouraging and empowering the next generation of female mariners is crucial to the continued growth and success of the maritime industry.

U.S.-FLAG CARGO SHIPPING ON THE LAKES SLOWED IN 2025

U.S.-flag Great Lakes freighters carried 71.3 million tons of cargo in 2025, an 8.9 percent decrease from a year ago. 2025 cargo movement on the Great Lakes was 8.1 percent below the fleet's 5-year average. Except for salt shipments, which increased by 4.1 percent, all commodity shipments decreased in 2025. Iron ore shipments were down 10.8 percent from 2024 to 39.1 million tons. Coal cargos declined to 6.5 million tons, a decrease of 12 percent. Limestone shipments of 20.1 million tons were below last year's shipments by 4.7 percent. Cement cargos saw a decrease of 1 percent, while sand and grain shipments were down 26.5 percent and 13.1 percent, respectively, in 2025.

SAFETY AWARD NOMINATION PERIOD

The award window to submit nominations for the Jones F. Devlin Safety Awards and Safety Achievement Awards is open now and will only remain open until February 27. It only takes 5-10 minutes to complete. The awards are issued by the Chamber of Shipping of America (CSA).

Everyone is welcome to participate, not just CSA members. Links to the website to submit awards: Jones F. Devlin Safety Awards for two or more years without a Lost Time Incident: Jones F. Devlin Safety Award - <https://csashipping.org/awards-program/jones-f-devlin-safety-award/> Safety Achievement Awards for outstanding feats of safety by a vessel: Safety Achievement Award - <https://csashipping.org/awards-program/ship-safety-achievement-award/> Reach out to Awards@CSAShipping.org with any questions.

AIR TRAVEL TO THE M.E.B.A. SCHOOL MUST GO THROUGH PLANS COORDINATOR

M.E.B.A. Plan participants flying to the Calhoon M.E.B.A. Engineering School must book their flights through the Union's in-house Travel Coordinator.

M.E.B.A. members must book all flights through the Plans' Travel Coordinator by calling the toll-free number (877) 324-6322. Normal operating hours for the Travel Coordinator are Monday–Friday, 0900-1700 ET. Travel inquiries may also be made by email at travel@mebaschool.org.

No more than two round-trip reimbursements will be made during any calendar year. There must be at least a one-week break between classes to be eligible to receive a second round-trip transportation reimbursement. Travel paid or reimbursed by an M.E.B.A. Training Plan contributing employer for travel to the School immediately before or after an attended class will not be eligible for reimbursement by the M.E.B.A. Training Plan.

For the purpose of all air transportation reimbursement, the maximum reimbursement shall be the fares available through the Travel Agency calculated from the minimum cost of round-trip, non-refundable, seven-day, advance purchase coach air fare as determined by the Training Plan's Travel Agency. Additional information may be found on the school's website: at <https://www.mebaschool.org/travel-and-arrival/meba-members-travel-arrangements>

USMMA WELCOMES NEW SUPERINTENDENT

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) formally installed Rear Admiral Anthony Ceraolo, USMS, as its 15th Superintendent during a ceremony this week. Ceraolo has served as acting Superintendent since June 2025. He previously completed a 34-year career in the U.S. Coast Guard before joining USMMA as Chief of Staff in 2023. His Coast Guard service included command of

multiple cutters, leadership of major shore units, and a deployment as Commander of U.S. Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia.

SHIPPING NEEDS TO FIX ITS FLAWS OR ABANDONMENT WILL INCREASE

The abandonment of seafarers by unscrupulous shipowners is reaching record levels, according to a recent report by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), but it will only intensify unless deep structural flaws in the way shipowners operate their ships, are improved, according to the CEO of Seafarers' Rights International (SRI). Professor Hilton Staniland stressed that while there are many responsible shipowners, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) continue to work hard to improve transparency and accountability, the playing field is not level and unscrupulous shipowners can abandon ships and crews repeatedly because of deep structural flaws in the maritime industry.

“Chief among these is the absence of any enforceable international requirement for a genuine link between shipowners and their ships. Complex corporate structures and opaque flags allow beneficial owners to hide, shed responsibility, and re-emerge under new identities, while seafarers are left to bear the consequences,” he said. “When abandonment occurs, seafarers are often forced to rely on centuries-old principles of Admiralty law to survive. Maritime liens for unpaid wages and repatriation costs allow a ship to be arrested and sold, regardless of who owns it. These protections were developed long before the ILO or the IMO existed, precisely because courts recognized the extreme imbalance of power between seafarers and shipowners. That such remedies remain necessary today is a stark indictment of modern enforcement,” he added.

These issues will return to the spotlight at the IMO Legal Committee meeting in April 2026. The SRI said, the question is whether the international community can move beyond expressions of concern and finally close the loopholes that allow seafarers to be treated as disposable. “International maritime law should not depend on ancient remedies to correct modern failures.”

ANNIVERSARY OF THE MARINE ELECTRIC

It was 43 years ago today, that the coal carrier SS MARINE ELECTRIC capsized and sank in heavy weather off Chincoteague, Virginia in the early morning hours of February 12, 1983. 31 crewmembers perished including six M.E.B.A. engineers. M.E.B.A. lost Chief Engineer Richard Powers, 1st A/E Michael Price, 2nd A/E Howard Scott, 3rd A/E Steve Browning, 3rd A/E Charles Giddens and M.E.B.A. Calhoon School Cadet George Wickboldt. They all went down with the ship. Most of the remaining crew pitched into the sea were unable to survive the near-freezing Atlantic waters that claimed them before a Coast Guard helicopter arrived on the scene 90 minutes later. Only three crewmembers survived: Chief Mate Robert M. Cusick Jr., Third Mate Eugene Kelly and Able Seaman Paul Dewey.

The vessel was built in 1944 as World War II T2 tanker but was converted into a bulk carrier in 1962 with a new mid-section. An investigation established that the ship was unseaworthy with serious deck plating and hatch cover issues and should never have been permitted to leave port. Author Robert Frump wrote a great book about the incident and its aftermath called *Until the Sea Shall Free Them*. It details the tragedy and talks about how M.E.B.A. President Jesse Calhoon and retired Coast Guard Capt. Dominic Calicchio helped reform the inspection process of decrepit vessels. Congress also established the Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer program and survival suits were made mandatory.

HALLS, OFFICES CLOSED MONDAY FOR PRESIDENTS DAY

As always, the third Monday in February marks the observance of Presidents Day. M.E.B.A. halls and offices will be closed on Monday, February 16. The holiday was officially approved in 1968 as "Washington's Birthday" in honor of our first President, George Washington (born Feb. 22, 1732). It eventually evolved into "Presidents Day" and became an occasion to also celebrate the birthday of another one of our greatest Presidents – Abraham Lincoln (born Feb. 12, 1809). But on Monday, feel free to also honor the memories of the other two February Presidents - William Henry Harrison (born Feb. 9, 1773) and Ronald Reagan (born Feb. 6, 1911). However, the way the calendar works, it's impossible that one of those Presidential birthdays can actually fall on Presidents Day. Incidentally, October and November are the months with the most Presidential birthdays – 6 each.

MARDI GRAS ON TUESDAY

The New Orleans Union hall will be closed on Tuesday (2/17) for the Mardi Gras celebration. Fat Tuesday is the last big bash before Lent, as Ash Wednesday commences the very next day. The Carnival/Mardi Gras season began on January 6 as "Twelfth Night" and ends on midnight on Fat Tuesday. The official Mardi Gras colors are purple (representing "justice"), green (faith), and gold (power). King Cake is a traditional Mardi Gras treat. It's usually decorated in Mardi Gras colors and often has a small toy baby inside. Traditionally, whoever finds it has to buy the next cake or throw the next party. Parades are organized by groups called "krewes." Krewes plan the parades, costumes, and celebrations. People throw beads and small trinkets from parade floats. These items are called "throws" and are meant to be fun souvenirs. New Orleans is famous for Mardi Gras, but other U.S. cities celebrate too. Mobile, Alabama has one of the oldest Mardi Gras traditions in the country.

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

Monday, March 2 – **Boston**@1200; **Seattle (Fife)**@1300.

Tuesday, March 3 – **CMES**@1430; **Charleston**@1400; **Houston**@1315; **Oakland**@1230.

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

Thursday, March 5 – **L.A. (San Pedro)**@1230; **NY/NJ**@1300; **Norfolk**@1300; **Tampa**@1300.

Friday, March 6 – **Honolulu**@1100

-----FINISHED WITH ENGINES-----



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. Website: 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 Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram. The Calhoon M.E.B.A. Engineering School can be contacted at (410) 822-9600 or www.mebaschool.org. M.E.B.A. Plans is at (410) 547-9111 or www.mebaplans.org