

# 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"*

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### **M.E.B.A. HELPS WIN PAY CAP ADJUSTMENT FOR GOVT. FLEET CIVMARs**

The recently implemented National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 makes important changes to how Civilian Mariner (CivMar) compensation is handled across the Government Fleet.

Most notably, the law raises the maximum annual pay rate for CivMars to match the salary of the Vice President of the United States. In addition, Section 1101 removes the application of the annual aggregate pay cap to CivMars whose pay is set under the maritime pay statute. This change also lifts prior limits on premium pay, allowing Civilian Mariners to receive all compensation earned in the same calendar year for the work they perform.

These changes correct a long-standing issue that prevented Government Fleet mariners from being fully paid for their time at sea. For members serving aboard vessels operated by the Military Sealift Command, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and NOAA, this means earned pay will no longer be reduced or delayed due to outdated statutory limits. Over time, these reforms are expected to improve recruitment, retention, and overall fairness in government fleet compensation.

M.E.B.A. Legislative Department worked hard on this advancement and the Union would like to thank the leadership of the affected federal agencies, for working together to educate lawmakers and secure these critical changes on behalf of our members. Additional guidance will be issued by the agencies as implementation moves forward.

### **M.E.B.A. TAKES PART IN CONGRESSIONAL FERRY CAUCUS**

This week, the Congressional Ferry Caucus convened its first-ever member roundtable to discuss ferry-related policies that should be incorporated into the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill. The discussion focused on ensuring long-term federal support for ferry systems that provide essential transportation links for coastal and island communities across the country.

The roundtable featured representatives from ferry operators and maritime labor organizations, including the Public Ferry Coalition and maritime labor represented by the M.E.B.A., MM&P, IBU and ILWU. M.E.B.A. was represented by Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha, NY/NJ Patrolman Kenny Smith, and Director of Government Affairs Erick Siahaan. M.E.B.A. emphasized the need for federal policy solutions to address maritime workforce shortages, training challenges, and other related

issues critical to maintaining safe, reliable ferry service. Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha noted that “to retain and recruit mariners in today’s climate these ferry units will need to pay wages that are competitive with the industry as a whole.”

Members of Congress participating in the roundtable included Caucus co-Chairs Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY), Emily Randall (D-WA), Nick Begich (R-AL), John Garamendi (D-CA), and Chelle Pingree (D-ME), each representing districts served by major ferry systems.

Coalition members indicated their intent to continue a series of bipartisan discussions aimed at securing stable, long-term federal funding streams to support ferry operations, workforce development, and capital investment, recognizing ferries as vital infrastructure for many coastal and maritime-dependent communities.

### **MAERSK DENVER RED SEA TRANSIT GIVES HOPE FOR RESUMPTION OF SUEZ SAILINGS**

Last week, the MAERSK DENVER transited the Bab el-Mandeb Strait into the Red Sea giving hope for the potential resumption of Suez-based East–West sailings. The ceasefire in the Gaza conflict, in effect since October, has revived optimism for a normalization of Red Sea shipping. The company had tested the waters in December when the MAERSK SEBAROK, a vessel in Maersk’s international fleet, completed a transit through the Red Sea corridor as part of a cautious test marking the first Maersk vessel to return to that passage in nearly two years.

The company noted, “The safety of our crew, vessels and cargo remains of utmost importance to us, and the necessary safety measures were applied during transit.” They said, “we are closely monitoring developments in the Red Sea area and exploring opportunities for a safe and sustainable return to East-West Suez transit.”

You can check out the M.E.B.A. Facebook page to see a photo of the M.E.B.A. officers aboard the MAERSK DENVER for that transit including C/E Jeremy Birchfield, 1st A/E William Kytte, 2nd A/E Patrick Fales and 3rd A/E Samuel Tucker.

### **WASHINGTON SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET ADDRESSES FERRIES**

Washington Governor Bob Ferguson released his proposed 2026 supplemental budget in late December with his plan adding \$1 billion for up to three new 160-auto hybrid-electric ferries, on top of the three already funded. It also includes \$150 million for preservation and maintenance to keep the system’s three oldest boats (TILLIKUM, KALEETAN and YAKIMA) in service until the new vessels arrive.

Lawmakers are reviewing the Governor’s plan during the 60-day legislative session that began on Jan. 12 and runs through March 12.

### **DOL AWARDS MILLIONS TO TRAIN NEXT GENERATION SHIPBUILDERS**

The U.S. Labor Department announced the award of nearly \$14 million in funding to support the development of programs aimed at reinvigorating and rebuilding the U.S. maritime industry and workforce. \$8 million was awarded to Delaware County Community College and \$5.8 million to the Massachusetts Maritime Academy to advance the next generation of American shipbuilders through hands-on, cutting-edge training programs developed in conjunction with international partners.

The projects will develop a specialized, internationally recognized curriculum on shipbuilding trades to expand apprenticeship opportunities in the United States, working directly with U.S. shipyards and supporting innovation in areas such as modular and icebreaker technology.

These efforts support the growing strategic importance of collaborating with allied nations on maritime issues in the Arctic and polar regions. The U.S. recently signed a joint statement of intent with Canada and Finland to continue the Icebreaker Collaboration Effort Pact, strengthening Arctic security and maritime capability.

### **APPLY FOR UNION PLUS SCHOLARSHIPS**

M.E.B.A. families have until January 31, 2026 to apply for college education assistance money through Union Plus. Union Plus is doling out one-time cash awards of \$500 to \$4,000 for study beginning in the Fall of 2026. 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 details. 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 Saturday, January 31, 2026, at noon (EST). Applications arriving after the deadline will not be considered. The award date is May 31, 2026. During the first week of June 2026, award recipients will be notified.

Current and retired members of unions participating in any Union Plus program, their spouses and their dependent children (as defined by IRS regulations) are eligible. Grandchildren are not eligible unless a legal dependent (as defined by IRS regulations). At least one year of continuous union membership by the applicant, applicant's spouse or parent (if applicant is a dependent).

The one-year membership minimum must have been satisfied by May 31, 2025. Members of participating unions from the U.S., Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands and Canada are eligible. The applicant must be accepted into a U.S. accredited college, university, community college, technical or trade school at the time awards are issued. Awards must be used for the 2026 - 2027 school year. Undergraduate and graduate students are eligible to apply.

Get the official application and all the details including eligibility criteria by visiting [unionplus.org/scholarship](http://unionplus.org/scholarship)

### **THE "BIG U" COULD BE UNDERWATER BY MARCH**

One of the greatest ocean liners ever built is slated to become the largest artificial reef ever created, with a scuttling potentially taking place as early as March 2026. The SS UNITED STATES still holds the "Blue Riband" westbound trans-Atlantic speed record. M.E.B.A. officers filled both engine rooms of the great ship during the Big U's heyday in the 1950s and '60s.

The iconic vessel was retired in 1969. Since 2009, the ship's conservancy had sought to repurpose the ship as a museum, but finally ran out of time while it searched for suitors. With the Big U facing eviction from its Philadelphia port, the conservancy finally decided to accept a plan to transform the ship into an artificial reef calling it the "most dignified" choice over scrapping.

Owners of the nearly 1,000-foot SS UNITED STATES outlined a provisional schedule for the vessel's final chapter, with plans to sink the famed ocean liner off the Florida Panhandle. The proposal has been under development for more than a year, even as preservation advocates continued to press for the ship's restoration and return to service in some form. Despite those efforts, tourism officials say roughly 80 percent of the environmental remediation needed to satisfy state and federal requirements has already been completed.

For supporters of the project, including the ship's conservancy, the move marks an emotional but fitting new chapter for a vessel long associated with American engineering and ambition.

Currently in Mobile, Alabama, crews are stripping the ship of hazardous materials, leaving a clean steel hull designed to safely host corals, fish, and other marine life. Once prepared, tugboats will tow the empty shell to its permitted location, where it will form a towering reef in an area with little natural structure.

Florida already leads the nation in artificial reef development, and Okaloosa County has sunk dozens of large vessels over the years. The SS UNITED STATES would eclipse the current record-holder, the aircraft carrier USS ORISKANY, which was reefed off Pensacola in 2006.

### **M.E.B.A. HALLS AND OFFICES TO HONOR MLK DAY**

M.E.B.A. Union halls and offices will be closed on Monday, January 19<sup>th</sup> in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Along with his exceptional leadership in advancing civil rights, MLK was a champion of workers and of those seeking union recognition. He believed that unionizing is one of our most vital civil rights.

At the Illinois AFL-CIO Convention in 1965, King noted, "At the turn of the century, women earned approximately ten cents an hour, and men were fortunate to receive twenty cents an hour. The average work week was sixty to seventy hours. During the thirties, wages were a secondary issue; to have a job at all was the difference between the agony of starvation and a flicker of life. The nation, now so vigorous, reeled and tottered almost to total collapse. The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old age pensions, government relief for the destitute, and above all new wage levels that meant not mere survival, but a tolerable life. The captains of industry did not lead this transformation; they resisted it until they were overcome. When in the thirties the wave of union organization crested over our nation, it carried to secure shores not only itself but the whole society."

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

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

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

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

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

Friday, February 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](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)*