

# 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 3 – January 20, 2022



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### **AWARD OF WATSON-CLASS CONTRACT TO PATRIOT WILL PROCEED**

The award of the Military Sealift Command Watson-class LMSRs to ship manager Patriot Contract Services, LLC can proceed now that a protest that held up the award for almost a year has been resolved.

Patriot had provided excellent management of the eight government-owned Large, Medium-Speed, Roll-On, Roll-Off (LMSR) vessels for seven years before winning the bid in March 2021 to continue their stewardship of the vessels. However, a protest challenging the award put the process on hold until a judge could address the filing. That protest was denied this week and the contract, consisting of a firm one-year base period followed by four 1-year options, can proceed.

The Watson-class LMSRs include the USNS WATSON, USNS SISLER, USNS DAHL, USNS RED CLOUD, USNS CHARLTON, USNS WATKINS, USNS POMEROY and USNS SODERMAN. M.E.B.A./MM&P/SIU/SUP/MFOW/ARA mariners have done an excellent job crewing these vessels since 2014 and continue to deliver for the Military Sealift Command. Mariners have been working under a bridge contract while the protest was being addressed.

MSC is expected to forward additional details soon about the upcoming timetable with their issuance of the expected "notice to proceed."

### **FINAL VOYAGE: FORMER GOVT. FLEET REP. JOE MUCHULSKY**

The M.E.B.A. world is saddened to learn of the passing of Joe Muchulsky on January 11 at the age of 71. Joe was a longtime mariner who served as the Union's Assistant Government Fleet Representative for four years until 2019 at our Norfolk Union hall.

Joe began sailing in the 1960s as a teenager aboard the SS UNITED STATES for several years until the end of the vessel's service life in 1969. He had started as the ship's Assistant Linen Keeper then progressively worked himself up to First Class Deck Steward then Tourist Class Waiter then Cabin Class Waiter and finally First Class Waiter. After the lay-up of the Big U, Joe shipped out on a variety of vessels with the National Maritime Union in a number of positions including Wiper, Fireman/Watertender/Oiler, Pumpman, Machinist, Reefer Engineer, Deck Engineer, Electrician, and Deck Engineer Machinist (DEMAC). In 1979, his career really took shape when he began shipping and excelling in the Military Sealift Command fleet. He worked his way up to Chief Engineer and

spent 32 years sailing for MSC on a multitude of vessels. Since then he spent several years lending his expertise to the Norfolk, VA Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy, where he helped with course development and served as an Instructor.

Joe was a Virginia Beach, VA resident and, among others, leaves behind his wife Melissa, daughter Angie and son Joe Muchulsky, Jr., who is a recent graduate of SUNY Maritime.

### **FAIR KIM IS THE NEW AMC PRESIDENT**

The American Maritime Congress (AMC) has announced the appointment of Commander Fair Kim, USCG (Ret.) as the organization's new President. He succeeds James Caponiti who retired in December after 10 ½ years with AMC, having served almost 8 years as its President. The AMC is a research and education group comprised of U.S.-flag ship owners and operators that have collective bargaining agreements with the M.E.B.A.

Mr. Kim joined AMC and has served as Policy Director since March 2017 after retiring from the U.S. Coast Guard. His appointment as President was effective on December 1, 2021. In this capacity, he oversees efforts to educate the public, policy makers and members of Congress on the critical importance of the United States deep-sea shipping to the Nation's strategic and economic security.

“Fair Kim has exceptional command of the issues and an impressive U.S. Coast Guard and legal background, making him ideally suited to advance the interests of AMC, the M.E.B.A., and its associated employers. I look forward to him taking on today's opportunities in the maritime industry and leading the way,” said Adam Vokac, AMC Board Chairman and M.E.B.A. President. “We are fortunate to have someone with his depth of experience on maritime issues, coupled with a deep passion for the U.S. Merchant Marine, and Fair will leverage his knowledge and expertise to promote the industry. His extensive seagoing experience, together with his commitment to strengthening the U.S. Merchant Marine to maintain the viability of maritime jobs, will enhance AMC's effectiveness and its mission to support American mariners and to influence lawmakers and Federal officials – as well as the public at large – with respect to the value of commercial sealift capability as a national defense necessity.”

Fair enjoys a wealth of maritime experience stemming from a distinguished career of more than 20 years in the U.S. Coast Guard. He retired from the Coast Guard in 2016 after serving in afloat operational billets and as a Judge Advocate (JAG). During his career, he deployed throughout the Caribbean, South America, West Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan. His last operational billet was as the Deputy Commander, Coast Guard Patrol Forces South Asia where he supervised the patrol squadron that provides security to Coalition interests in the Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Horn of Africa. In addition, he supervised the Coast Guard deployed to Forward Operating Bases in Afghanistan to ensure that war materiel was properly loaded into shipping containers before being redeployed by U.S. Transportation Command. In his final active-duty tour he served as Legislative Liaison and Counsel to the Coast Guard's Office of Congressional Affairs.

Fair is a graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and University of Florida School of Law, and is licensed to practice in Florida and Connecticut.

## **M.E.B.A. DISCUSSES MARINER SHORTAGE ON MARITIME TV WEBCAST SERIES**

M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac took part in Maritime TV's "Digimariners" webcast series that brings maritime insiders together for online discussions and analysis of pressing industry issues. Adam delivered a presentation focusing on how the supply chain crisis has further intensified the shortage of qualified mariners.

President Vokac talked about the challenges that mariners face, even without the added burden of COVID, such as the inherent dangers and risks along with the sheer quantity of regulations and required certifications. He also talked about different ways the industry can attract mariners, such as increasing wages, improving work rules and making small but substantive quality of life-at-sea improvements regarding shore leave, reliable reliefs, good food, and internet access. He also detailed a series of less obvious suggestions to entice budding young mariners to our industry, such as expanding the focus of maritime schools on licensed programs and better educating Americans about the integral role of waterborne shipping. A question and answer session after the talk led to a discussion of the Union and the high-level training going on at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School.

It's an interesting watch, check it out! You can visit Maritime TV at [www.maritimetv.com](http://www.maritimetv.com) or go directly to the Vokac presentation at [www.maritimetv.com/Events/DigiMariner-V/VideoId/4630/digimariner-v-presenter-adam-vokac](http://www.maritimetv.com/Events/DigiMariner-V/VideoId/4630/digimariner-v-presenter-adam-vokac)

## **ANOTHER ENCOURAGING PIRACY REPORT**

The issuance of the annual International Maritime Bureau (IMB) piracy report for 2021 reveals the lowest number of reported incidents for any year since 1994. IMB attributes the drop to vigorous action taken by authorities, but called for continued coordination and vigilance to ensure the long-term protection of seafarers.

In 2021, the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre received 132 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships. Incidents comprise 115 vessels boarded, 11 attempted attacks, five vessels fired upon and one vessel hijacked. Piracy is on the rise in the Singapore Straits where 37 incidents were reported, a 50% increase over 2020. Though reported incidents in the Gulf of Guinea were down, the area accounted for all reported kidnappings in 2021 with 57.

South American ports in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, and ports in Mexico and Haiti continue to be affected by incidents of armed robbery at sea. Thirty-six incidents were reported in 2021 compared to 30 in 2020, with six crew threatened, four taken hostage and two assaulted. Thirty-one vessels were boarded in total, the majority at anchor, figures for the region include three reported attempted boardings and two vessels being fired upon. Incidents in the Peruvian anchorage of Callao have more than doubled from eight in 2020 to 18 in 2021. While the direct threat of attacks from Somali based pirates appears to have decreased, the IMB Piracy Reporting Center continues to encourage vigilance among shipmasters, particularly when transiting close to the Somali coast.

## **CDC MAKES CRUISE SHIP COVID GUIDELINES VOLUNTARY**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has let its restrictive cruise ship Conditional Sailing Order expire and has made the policy voluntary. The CSO implemented a series of COVID-related health and safety conditions that had to be met before large passenger vessels were permitted to operate in U.S. waters. Such conditions involved ensuring that a large percentage of passengers and crew are

vaccinated and the implementation of protocols involving testing and quarantining, along with many other measures.

Those mandatory guidelines became optional after the CSO expired on Saturday. Cruise lines are encouraged to continue to follow all CDC public health measures, including reporting, testing, and infection prevention and control. It is expected that most cruise ship companies will continue adhering to the voluntary CDC program.

In related news, Norwegian Cruise Line-America announced that it won't be restarting cruise operations on its U.S.-flagged vessel PRIDE OF AMERICA until at least April, as Hawaii is battling a recent Omicron surge.

### **FMC FINALIZES REPORT EXAMINING COVID IMPACT ON CRUISE SHIP INDUSTRY**

The Federal Maritime Commission issued its final report on a near two-year fact finding that examined the impact of COVID-19 on the passenger vessel industry.

FMC Commissioner Louis Sola headed up Fact Finding 30 which highlights the importance of the cruise industry and related sectors to U.S. cities. The report also provides an update on the status of a proposed rule amending FMC regulations to clarify under what circumstances and how quickly a passenger can receive a refund for a voyage cancelled or delayed by a cruise line.

Commissioner Sola stressed the need to provide the vaccine to U.S.-bound mariners and the necessity to vaccinate passenger vessel crews. Additionally, he issued six separate reports examining economic impacts to specific states and regions.

“Sensible and effective safety and health protocols can successfully minimize potential exposure to communicable diseases aboard a vessel, whether COVID-19 or some other pathogen. Ports and cruise lines have aggressively pursued creating the standards and infrastructure that allows ships to sail and be prepared to manage any health contingency that manifests itself. I hope to never see another no sail or conditional sail order issued,” said Commissioner Sola.

“We cannot live in a world where our only choices are to either move freely without risk or lock down ourselves and the economy. COVID is here to stay, and we must learn to live with it. The system in place that allows cruise ships to operate is working to mitigate shipboard spread of COVID-19,” he said.

### **WSF RIDERSHIP BEGINS TO REBOUND FOLLOWING COVID LOW**

Annual ridership aboard the Washington State Ferries rebounded from the 2020 pandemic numbers by almost 3.3 million customers in 2021 to nearly 17.3 million. The ferry system cited the prevalence of COVID-19 vaccines and a boost in tourism as the main reasons for their largest year-to-year ridership increase on record.

For only the second time since it began operations in 1951, and the second year in a row, WSF carried more vehicles with a driver (8.9 million) than passengers (8.4 million) in 2021, as many continued to work from home or chose to drive on board because of the pandemic. State ferry ridership in 2021 rose to roughly 72% of 2019 pre-COVID-19 numbers, with vehicles climbing to 85% and walk-on

customers up to 42% of pre-pandemic levels. They said ridership is expected to rebound further when COVID-19 eases and as WSF restores sailings closer to pre-pandemic levels.

#### **FOUR FREE COVID TEST KITS FOR HOUSEHOLDS**

As you may know, the Federal Government will supply four at-home COVID-19 test kits for free (including shipping) to each residential home, upon request. It's extremely easy to get yours – just go to <https://special.usps.com/testkits> and supply your name and address. You can add your email address as well, if you want to receive delivery notifications. Orders usually ship within 7-12 days.

These are the COVID-19 rapid antigen tests that get a result within 15 minutes. They work best as a COVID indicator if the test taker is already experiencing symptoms, and are less accurate for those in the earliest stage of infection or those who are asymptomatic. The PCR test (which involves lab work) is the most accurate test but the process is time-consuming and results may not be available for up to a week.

However, the spread of the Omicron variant has strained the availability of test kits at local stores and these free rapid tests give more Americans the ability to help keep COVID at bay. Visit the link now and get your free test kit, and stay safe.

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

**Monday, February 7** – Boston@1200; Seattle-Fife@1300.

**Tuesday, February 8** – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230.

**Wednesday, February 9** – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – **Register now at [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org)**

**Thursday, February 10** – L.A.-San Pedro@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.

**Friday, February 11** – 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.*