

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"
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CROSSED THE BAR: NOLA PLANS REP. MARY STARITA

Those who cycled through M.E.B.A.'s New Orleans Union hall at any time since the early 1980s will remember Plans Representative Mary Starita, who made sure members in the Big Easy stayed on a steady course with their benefits and plans. Mary laid down her watch on January 8, 2026 at the age of 73 following a six-month battle with cancer. She spent over 40 years with the M.E.B.A., and was a mainstay at the NOLA hall, working in 11 M.E.B.A. administrations including that of Jesse Calhoon who hired her in 1983. She lived in Metairie, Louisiana and retired in 2024.

Mary had one son, Vince, and a granddaughter, Ava, who she cherished. She had a love for all animals but especially felines, including her own cat Nivu. In her spare time and during retirement, Mary enjoyed creating seasonal wood crafts and was grateful for all the interactions and friendships with her M.E.B.A. family. Mary is well-remembered and missed.

COURT REJECTS CONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE TO JONES ACT

The American Maritime Partnership (AMP) praised a U.S. District Court ruling that dismissed a legal challenge to the Jones Act, reaffirming the law's constitutionality and its role in supporting the U.S. Merchant Marine. In a 46-page opinion, Chief Judge James E. Boasberg rejected claims that the Act violates the Constitution, finding it to be neutral, long-standing cabotage legislation that applies uniformly and serves legitimate national interests such as national security, economic security, and maritime employment.

The lawsuit was filed by Kōloa Rum Company of Kauai, Hawaii, which argued that the 1920 Jones Act flies in the face of a constitutional provision barring Congress from favoring the ports of one state over another. Judge Boasberg of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia resoundingly rejected claims that the Jones Act violates the Due Process Clause and the obscure Port Preference Clause of the Constitution.

Jennifer Carpenter, President of the American Maritime Partnership, said "The Jones Act is foundational to our nation, and we thank the Court for its thoughtful analysis of the history of the law. This decision reaffirms not only the constitutionality but also the critical importance of the Jones Act to every American."

The opinion concludes that the Jones Act also satisfies a rational basis review, noting that maintaining “a strong domestic merchant marine, protecting national security by ensuring that vessels are available for military use, and supporting American maritime employment” are “paradigmatic examples of legitimate governmental interests.”

The policy is consistent with a 2025 legal review by Seafarers Rights International that found that 105 nations – representing over 85% of the world’s coastlines – are covered by laws similar to the Jones Act.

The memorandum opinion, issued on Jan. 20, granted motions to dismiss that were submitted by the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and maritime industry intervenors, including Matson Navigation Co., the American Maritime Partnership, and the AFL-CIO’s Maritime Trades Department.

M.E.B.A. REP. ARGUES THAT WSF WOES TIE INTO NEED FOR ENGINEERS, CLOSING PAY GAP

In a column penned for the news organization *Washington State Standard*, M.E.B.A.’s Eric Winge argues that Washington State Ferries’ ongoing reliability problems are driven less by a shortage of vessels and more by a critical lack of licensed marine engineers. Winge serves as M.E.B.A.’s Washington State Ferry Representative. While praising the state’s ambitious push toward a hybrid-electric fleet and recent leadership reforms, Winge warns that chronic underinvestment in engine room wages has left the system short-staffed and facing a looming retirement cliff. He contends that without closing the wage gap for marine engineers, the state risks sidelining its billion-dollar ferry investments, since even the newest and greenest vessels cannot operate without the skilled crews needed to run, maintain, and safely repair them.

Winge goes on to argue that the engine room staffing crisis is not a theoretical future problem but a present operational constraint. According to his column, canceled and delayed sailings are increasingly tied to Coast Guard manning requirements that cannot be met when licensed engineers are unavailable, as well as to deferred maintenance on an aging fleet. Marine engineers, he writes, are responsible for operating and repairing the complex systems that keep ferries running, yet their work remains largely invisible to the riding public despite being essential to safety and reliability.

He traces the shortage directly to compensation, noting that Washington State Ferries was once among the best-paying ferry systems in the nation, but that wages for engine room personnel have failed to keep pace with the broader maritime labor market. Today, Winge says, engineers’ pay lags roughly 20 percent behind deck counterparts, contributing to persistent vacancies and accelerating departures to private-sector shipping and other ferry systems. Compounding the issue is a looming retirement cliff, with roughly half of WSF’s most experienced engineers eligible to retire by 2027.

Winge warns that unless the wage gap is closed, the state risks undermining its massive capital investments. New hybrid-electric vessels, he argues, will demand even higher levels of technical skill, training, and experience to operate and maintain. The early service history of the hybrid-electric WENATCHEE, which required repeated repairs after entering service, underscores the complexity of integrating new propulsion technology into decades-old hulls and systems.

Closing the wage gap, Winge contends, would cost a fraction of the more than \$1 billion Washington is spending on new ferries, yet would pay outsized dividends in reliability. Competitive wages would help retain senior engineers long enough to mentor and train the next generation, ensuring a smooth transition to a greener fleet. Ferry service, he concludes, is a backbone of Washington's transportation network and a major driver of tourism and local economies, and reliable operations are only possible if the skilled engineers who keep the fleet running are paid wages that reflect their indispensable role.

GREAT LAKES SHIPPING TAKES ITS WINTER BREAK

Shipping through the Soo Locks came to a seasonal halt just before midnight on January 15, marking the start of the annual Great Lakes winter closure. The navigation system is scheduled to return to service on March 25, following an intensive period of critical maintenance and repairs. Throughout the shutdown, crews will focus on infrastructure work at both the MacArthur and Poe Locks. Temporary panel bridges will be installed across each lock, allowing heavy equipment, materials, and personnel to move efficiently between work areas during the winter months.

At the MacArthur Lock, maintenance efforts will include the fabrication and replacement of spring boxes and lever arms for Gates 3, 4, and 5. Workers will also create a recess cutout to accommodate the panel bridge, repair a strut arm on Gate 2, and complete concrete and deck plate repairs on Gate 5. The Poe Lock will undergo its own slate of work, including an underfloor cleanout, manhole inspections, and a comprehensive five-year condition assessment. Planned repairs include work on Gate 1, installation of a lifting lug on Gate 4, repairs to Gate 3 jacking pedestals, and testing of specialized wall coatings designed to mitigate ice-related damage.

Beyond these major projects, crews will tackle numerous additional tasks across both locks, ranging from the replacement of pier fender timbers to preventative maintenance and inspections of electrical and mechanical systems.

The Soo Locks are a vital artery for Great Lakes commerce, accommodating more than 4,500 vessel transits each year and moving up to 80 million tons of cargo. Iron ore, coal, wheat, and limestone make up a significant share of the commodities passing through the system.

The Poe Lock, which opened in 1969, measures 1,200 feet in length, while the older MacArthur Lock, completed in 1943, spans 800 feet. Construction is also underway on a new lock that will match the dimensions of the Poe Lock - 1,200 feet long, 110 feet wide, and 32 feet deep—with completion targeted for the summer of 2030.

Following an agreement secured several years ago with Interlake Steamship, our members continue to work aboard vessels, as needed, under M.E.B.A. contract during the winter layup at various shipyards & docks in and around the Great Lakes. Such maintenance and repair work had previously been conducted by a mixture of direct employees, contractors, and shipyard/ship repair companies of skilled workers, typically non-union.

IMB NOTES PIRACY RISE IN END-OF-YEAR STATS

The ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported an increase in global piracy and armed robbery incidents in 2025, though most cases remained low-level. The IMB recorded 137 incidents worldwide, up from 116 in 2024. These included 121 boardings, four hijackings, two vessels fired upon, and 10 attempted attacks.

Despite the generally low severity, violence against seafarers persisted. In 2025, 46 crew members were taken hostage and 25 kidnapped, with additional cases of threats, injuries, and assaults. The use of firearms rose sharply, reported in 42 incidents compared to 26 the previous year. ICC Secretary General John W.H. Denton emphasized that protecting seafarers and securing shipping lanes is vital to global supply chains and economic stability. “Maritime trade remains a cornerstone of real economic activity and growth,” he said. “The rise in reported maritime incidents highlights the importance of protecting seafarers and securing key shipping routes not only for crew safety, but for the stability of global supply chains and the economies that depend on them. Ensuring safe passage at sea requires sustained cooperation, with regional and international partners working together to safeguard maritime commerce.”

Regionally, the Singapore Straits recorded the highest number of incidents, with 80 cases—more than half of all global reports—though numbers declined later in the year following arrests by Indonesian authorities. Somali piracy remained limited, reflecting the continued deterrent effect of naval patrols, while the Gulf of Guinea saw relatively stable but concerning levels of violence, including multiple kidnappings.

IMB Director Michael Howlett stressed that sustained naval presence, regional cooperation, and prompt reporting of incidents remain essential. The IMB Piracy Reporting Centre reiterated that timely reporting is critical to preventing further attacks and safeguarding crews and vessels operating in high-risk waters.

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

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

Friday, February 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. 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 Calhoun 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