

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"
M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES
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M.E.B.A. VESSEL POWERS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT IN HOSTILE WATERS

The M.E.B.A.-crewed Maritime Security Program roll-on/roll-off vessel LIBERTY POWER was involved in an international incident on Friday as the vessel was transiting through the Persian Gulf. According to reports, two Iranian destroyers that were part of a military exercise, employed dangerous maneuvers and temporarily forced the Liberty Maritime vessel into Iranian waters in the early morning hours of January 24. LIBERTY POWER's crew remained calm, leaned on their training and were eventually able to maneuver back into international waters.

The ship and mariners are safe and were escorted by the U.S. Navy to a protected harbor. M.E.B.A. represents the Deck and Engine Officers aboard the vessel while the SIU represents the unlicensed crew. M.E.B.A. and SIU are working collaboratively with Liberty and government entities to ensure that all future transits by our vessels in the region have appropriate protection.

M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac noted that the Union is deeply troubled by the incident and was thankful that the crew was accounted for and safe. "In light of such events and the ongoing attacks by Houthi rebels on merchant vessels in the Red Sea, this is a key reminder of the vital role that American mariners serve in delivering critical supplies in service to the U.S. military by sailing into harm's way. We are grateful for the important work of our M.E.B.A. officers ensuring the safety and security of the crew on board. We want to make it abundantly clear that the protection of U.S.-flag vessels in international waters should be a top priority for the U.S. Navy and we will work with key officials to prevent such incidents in future transits."

CATO WORKING ON BEHALF OF FOREIGN INTERESTS TO DISMANTLE JONES ACT, SHIPPING EXPERT ALLEGES

Shipping expert John D. McCown, writing for the online site *Medium* has posted findings of his research of the anti-Jones Act CATO Institute that raises stark questions about the agency's motives and benefactors. McCown is the co-founder of shipping company Trailer Bridge and is also a Senior Fellow at the Center for Maritime Strategy

CATO is at the forefront in putting out misinformation and half-truths about the Jones Act in a bid to compromise or jettison the statute which would inevitably open up U.S. coastwise and inland water

trade to foreign entities. In the article, McCown found that CATO's campaign against the Jones Act is driven by foreign interests, specifically foreign corporations and governments, rather than independent research or objective analysis. He accused CATO and its lead figure on the Jones Act, Colin Grabow, of lacking genuine research and instead engaging in public relations tactics, such as cherry-picking data and using social media to repeat misleading claims. He highlighted a FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act) filing that revealed CATO's collaboration with the European Union (EU) and its lobbyists to undermine the Jones Act. This included producing videos, hosting events, and conducting outreach efforts aimed at facilitating European corporate interests in the U.S. market.

McCown criticized CATO for its financial ties to corporations, noting a significant increase in corporate contributions since Grabow joined. He suggested these contributions align with CATO's anti-Jones Act lobbying. The author argued that weakening or repealing the Jones Act would benefit foreign corporations while creating risks to U.S. national security and undermining the U.S. Merchant Marine.

Concluding that CATO's activities regarding the Jones Act are detrimental to U.S. maritime security and integrity, he called for a focus on strengthening the U.S. Merchant Marine instead of dismantling it. You can check out the article at <https://john-d-mccown.medium.com/cato-now-directing-efforts-of-fara-lobbyist-paid-by-eu-to-thwart-jones-act-65df9934cca3>

PRESIDENT RESHAPING NLRB AS PRO-LABOR FORCES DECRY "ILLEGAL" FIRING

President Trump continues to reshape the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) by firing board member Gwynne Wilcox, a Democrat whose term had been set to continue until August 2028. The position is not subject to at-will dismissal as board members can only be removed for "inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office" - not for political reasons. The NLRB's general counsel Jennifer Abruzzo was also dismissed, though that position is held at the President's discretion. Abruzzo, who had been the board's top prosecutor responsible for setting enforcement priorities and selecting cases for board review, was considered as one of the most pro-union general counsels in the agency's history.

The removal of Wilcox leaves the five-member board with only two sitting members. Without a quorum, the board is largely paralyzed, unable to rule on disputes, certify union elections, or enforce labor laws through injunctions — functions that are central to its role.

The AFL-CIO released a statement saying, "President Trump's firing of NLRB member Gwynne Wilcox, the first Black woman to serve on the board, is illegal and will have immediate consequences for working people. By leaving only two board members in their posts, the President has effectively shut down the National Labor Relations Board's operations, leaving the workers it defends on their own in the face of union-busting and retaliation. Alongside the firing of NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo, these moves will make it easier for bosses to violate the law and trample on workers' legal rights on the job and fundamental freedom to organize. Member Wilcox has already indicated she will challenge her firing, and we fully expect she will succeed in the courts and be restored to her position so she can continue to be a critical pro-worker voice on the NLRB."

TRAVEL TO CMES MUST GO THROUGH PLANS COORDINATOR

M.E.B.A. Plan participants traveling to the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School and M.E.B.A. Diagnostic Centers must book their flights through the Union's in-house Travel Coordinator. The Trustees of the M.E.B.A. Medical & Benefit Plans and the M.E.B.A. Training Plan re-issued the reminder, especially in light of the influx of new members into the Union unfamiliar with this necessary procedure. *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@mebaplans.org. Additional information may be found on the school's website: <https://www.mebaschool.org/travel-and-arrival/meba-members-travelarrangements>

UNION DENSITY DOWN

Though labor union approval ratings nationwide is over 70%, union membership declined last year from 10% to 9.9% of the workforce, the Department of Labor revealed. That represents a low-ebb of the workforce, the smallest recorded share despite a notable increase in union election filings and several major strikes throughout the year. The total number of unionized workers remained relatively stable, with a decline of approximately 100,000 members, bringing the total to 14.3 million. One key factor behind the drop in union density was the strength of the labor market, which added 2.2 million jobs in 2024. However, non-union positions grew at a faster rate than unionized roles, contributing to the overall decline in the membership rate. The private sector saw a decrease of roughly 184,000 union members, while the public sector experienced a modest increase of about 15,000 members.

In both 2022 and 2023, union membership reached record lows, primarily due to a surge in job creation as the economy rebounded from the pandemic and businesses resumed operations. Newly established companies typically begin without union representation, leaving employees to decide whether to organize — a process that requires time, effort, and resources to navigate.

SKYROCKETING SEAFARER ABANDONMENTS

Global shipowner abandonment of seafarers jumped by 87% last year over 2023 new data reveals. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) reported that seafarer abandonment is spiraling out of control, almost doubling with 3,133 seafarers abandoned by shipowners in 2024 compared to 1,676 in 2023. A total 312 vessels were abandoned last year compared to 132 vessels in 2023 – a staggering 136% increase. Twenty-eight ships were also responsible for abandoning multiple crews in the same year, with three vessels reported three times and 25 reported twice.

Under the 2006 Maritime Labor Convention, a seafarer is considered abandoned if the shipowner fails to cover their repatriation costs, neglects to provide essential maintenance and support, or unilaterally severs ties with them, including withholding contractual wages for at least two months. Abandoned seafarers can experience months of unpaid wages, extremely poor onboard conditions, inadequate food and clean drinking water, and long periods of work without proper rest. In some cases, they are left completely stranded for months – even years – on end.

An ITF report, submitted to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), details the skyrocketing increase in the reported abandonment, and highlights the failure of the Flag of Convenience system that is central to ongoing impunity for abuses of seafarers' rights.

Ninety percent of abandoned vessels in 2024 sailed under a flag of convenience. While Panama remains the flag with the most abandonments (43), there are a number of other flag states with a stark increase in cases. Palau (37), Tanzania (30), Comoros (29), Cameroon (20) and Bahrain (16) all recorded double figures in 2024. Alarming, twenty cases were reported on vessels on which there was no flag, or a flag could not be identified, more than doubling the number of cases in this category.

TTD, PASS WELCOME NEWLY CONFIRMED DOT SECRETARY

The Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), representing 37 unions in the maritime, aviation, rail, transit, trucking, highway, longshore, and related industries, including the M.E.B.A., welcomed Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy to the job this week. Duffy was confirmed and sworn in yesterday and immediately had his hands full following the tragic collision of American Airlines 5342 with a Blackhawk helicopter approaching Washington DC's Reagan National Airport on Wednesday night.

The TTD statement, released before the tragedy noted, "Transportation labor congratulates Sean Duffy on his confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Transportation. As Transportation Secretary, Mr. Duffy will play a critical leadership role in overseeing the modal agencies that keep the traveling public and transportation workers safe, including the Federal Aviation, Railroad, Maritime and Transit Administrations...In his confirmation hearing, Mr. Duffy committed to upholding the two-person staffing minimum for freight train crews, acknowledged the importance of investing in our passenger rail network, pledged to increase air traffic controller staffing, and expressed his support for the Jones Act...We look forward to working with Secretary Duffy to improve America's transportation systems."

M.E.B.A. affiliate PASS (Professional Aviation Safety Specialists) also congratulated Secretary Duffy and pointed out that they look forward to working with him to strengthen staffing numbers to ensure the safety of the American flying public. "The FAA has prioritized hiring technicians and Congress has directed the FAA to hire more aviation safety inspectors, workforces both represented by PASS. The union will continue to advocate that the FAA meet its hiring targets in the name of public safety and hopes the incoming secretary agrees that these committed public servants are critical to the success of the National Airspace System, the largest, safest and most complex air traffic control system in the world."

TTD STATEMENT ON AIR CRASH THAT COST 67 LIVES

The TTD released a statement earlier today addressing the devastating air disaster last night between American Airlines Flight 5342 and a Blackhawk helicopter in Washington DC. In part, it noted: "Our hearts are with the families, friends, and loved ones of all who perished. May their memories be a blessing. The aviation industry is widely unionized, and a loss of this magnitude is felt across our entire labor family. An injury to one is an injury to all. We extend our deepest condolences to our siblings at the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) and the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), whose members were crewing the plane. Our sympathies are also with the United Association (UA) Steamfitters Local 602, who had four members on the flight, as well as the global figure skating community, whose skaters, coaches, and loved ones were also among the victims...The days and weeks ahead are unthinkable for the individuals whose lives have been forever altered by this tragedy. Yet, we are a land of survivors. As we wait for the National Transportation Safety Board and Federal

Aviation Administration to conclude its investigation, we urge everyone to refrain from speculating and to let the facts guide our path forward.”

CMES ADDS CLASSES TO 2025 SCHEDULE

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School has added the following courses to its 2025 schedule:

Wartsila RT Flex Basic (3-day course, Wednesday - Friday) - No time required on a flex engine - May 21–23; June 4–6; August 27–29; September 10–12; October 29–31; and November 5–7 - Students should expect to be in class until 1600 on the Friday.

Wartsila RT Flex Operator (5-day course) - Pre-requisite: Time on a flex engine or have taken the Basic course - June 2–6; June 9–13; September 8–12; September 15–19; and November 10–14.

Basic & Advanced IGF Code Operations (LNG as a Fuel) - February 10–13; March 24–27; and June 16–19. This is a 4-day course which runs Monday–Thursday.

Registration does not begin until May 1st for any class starting in July–December. Applications may be sent via the CMES website, faxed to (410) 822-7220, or emailed to applications@mebaschool.org

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

Monday, February 3 – **Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

Tuesday, February 4 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230.**

Wednesday, February 5 – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing mebahq@mebaunion.org**

Thursday, February 6 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

Friday, February 7 – **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 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