

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*  
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## **UNIONS URGE NATO TO INVEST IN MERCHANT MARINE**

A coalition of maritime unions, including the M.E.B.A., has released a joint appeal for NATO to boost funding for the Merchant Marine, emphasizing its essential role in countering emerging threats and safeguarding nations during crises. The statement coincides with NATO's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, underscoring the importance of merchant fleets in national resilience, security, and defense during growing geopolitical tensions. The unions, representing merchant seafarers from various NATO states, highlighted the current unstable global environment, citing the conflict in Ukraine, increasing violence in the Middle East, and the attempts of other nations to control the seas. They cautioned that the significant reduction in the number of skilled merchant seafarers and nationally flagged merchant vessels poses a severe risk to NATO's commitments to its members.

The letter was signed by Nautilus International (UK & Netherlands); ACV-Transcom (Belgium); CFDT: Union Fédérale Maritime (France); Danish Maritime Officers; Finnish Engineers' Association; Finnish Ship's Officers' Union; M.E.B.A. (U.S.); MM&P (U.S.); Norwegian Union of Marine Engineers; Seafarers' Union of Croatia; and Sjöbefälsföreningen Maritime Officers' Association (Sweden).

The statement notes that the dwindling number of merchant mariners and the lack of skilled officers and crewmembers weaken our collective and individual capacities to maintain military logistics and ensure the stability of crucial supply chains for energy, food, and medical supplies during crises and conflicts. They said that this decline leaves NATO nations vulnerable to significant risks with potentially catastrophic outcomes. They urged NATO to seize the moment and pledge substantial investment in maritime capabilities, to fortify their merchant fleets and support their maritime workforces. They collectively advocated for a partnership among maritime nations to enhance the pool of qualified merchant seafarers, increase nationally registered vessels, eliminate incentives for flags of convenience, and end the exploitation of foreign crews.

The letter can be viewed in full on the M.E.B.A. homepage ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)).

## **GAO REPORT ON INCREASING NOAA MARINER RECRUITING/RETENTION EFFORTS**

A newly-release U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report evaluates the efforts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in recruiting and retaining mariners in the midst of a global shortage. M.E.B.A. represents engine officers aboard the 15 NOAA research vessels that conduct a variety of scientific missions. The NOAA fleet collects data critical for nautical charts, fishery quotas, exploration of the nation's 4.3-million-square-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, storm surge modeling and climate research.

To address its shortfall, NOAA has implemented measures such as reducing the length of time mariners spend at sea and offering recruitment and retention bonuses. Despite these efforts, the GAO suggests that developing a comprehensive workforce planning process would better position NOAA to attract and retain mariners. The report, "NOAA Mariner Recruitment and Retention: Actions Needed to Develop a Strategic Workforce Planning Process" can be accessed [here](#).

NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) has emphasized the need to bolster the ranks of the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps and civilian professional mariners to meet their operational demands. But over the past five fiscal years, NOAA data indicates fluctuating recruitment and retention rates for both NOAA Corps officers and professional mariners, with instances where departures surpassed new hires. Recruitment and retention are influenced by several factors, including challenges related to work-life balance and compensation. OMAO has initiated various measures to tackle these challenges. However, it currently lacks comprehensive workforce plans for the NOAA Corps and professional mariners to steer its recruitment and retention strategies and workforce expansion efforts.

GAO noted that OMAO needs to establish and implement a workforce planning process that ensures ongoing active workforce plans. By integrating key principles of strategic workforce planning, they said that OMAO can more effectively expand its mariner workforce and fulfill its mission requirements.

## **M.E.B.A. TAKES PART IN CONGRESSIONAL MARITIME ROUNDTABLE**

The M.E.B.A. and industry representatives recently took part in an open discussion with Congressional representatives on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee exploring new proposals to enhance the U.S. flag fleet and domestic shipbuilding as a matter of economic and national security. The roundtable was overseen by the House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation and included representatives from various industry trade organizations, think-tanks, and maritime labor. M.E.B.A.'s Government Affairs Director Erick Siahaan attended on behalf of the Union and provided input in testimony presented by maritime labor. The roundtable focused on challenges faced by U.S.-flag shipping and opportunities to grow the American fleet through innovative policies to increase competition in global shipping.

The discussion highlighted the need for significant governmental investment to support U.S. commercial shipping and shipbuilding. Participants also discussed the need for new tax ideas, such as private business tax deductions to incentivize increased U.S.-flag shipping and tax breaks for U.S. mariners working on foreign voyages to address the nation's mariner shortage. A link to the roundtable discussion can be found [here](#).

### **M.E.B.A.-CREWED VESSEL AVERTS ATTACK NEAR YEMEN**

There were no injuries or damage taken after the M.E.B.A.-crewed Maritime Security Program vessel MAERSK SENTOSA was apparently fired upon in the northern Gulf of Aden on Tuesday. A Houthi spokesperson claimed they had targeted the vessel with ballistic and wing missiles. A Maersk representative noted that the SENTOSA reported a “flying object” in Tuesday’s early morning hours that missed the vessel. The company said, “No injuries to the crew or damage to the ship or cargo were reported. The vessel is currently continuing her voyage towards her next port of call...”

Since November, Houthi militants in Yemen have been conducting drone and missile attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab Strait, and Gulf of Aden, citing support for Palestinians in the Gaza conflict as their motive.

### **UPDATED NOTICE ON MARINER PASSPORT RENEWAL PROCEDURES**

The State Department has issued an update to its provisions governing passport renewals for mariners. This is part of the effort to expedite passport renewals for seafarers who need them for international voyages. The new procedures are effective as of late June 2024 and is an update to the previous notice issued in January 2023. The new notice is largely the same, but there is a slight fee increase and the procedures have now been opened up to mariners whose passports are expiring within one year (instead of just seven months).

The notice has been made available in full on the M.E.B.A. website in the “Documents & Member Notices” section.

### **UNIONS POWER AMERICA – CONTEST & SWEEPSTAKES**

Union Plus has launched its fourth annual “Unions Power America” contest in which they will be awarding over \$140,000 in cash prizes to union members in which the grand prize is \$50,000 and a trip to Spain. \$20,000 will be awarded as “First Prize,” \$10,000 for Second and thirty Third Place winners will receive \$2,000 apiece. The Contest runs until July 30. Union members enter the contest by sharing a story about how they, or a member they admire, are powering America in their community, at work or at home. You can enter at [unionplus.org/laborday](http://unionplus.org/laborday)

Union members can also enter the “Unions Power America” Sweepstakes for a chance to win various prizes and can earn bonus entries by completing additional activities. The Sweepstakes takes place from July 31-August 21. The Grand Prize is \$50,000 and a four-night stay at Casa de Campo Resort & Villas in the Dominican Republic. Two First Prize winners will receive \$5,000 each and 30 people will receive \$1,000 each. Winners will be announced on Labor Day, September 2<sup>nd</sup> in which there will be additional live event prizes handed out.

Union Plus programs, which are available to M.E.B.A. members, applicants, retirees and our affiliates, provide a vast range of money-saving benefits and services. The M.E.B.A. is enrolled in dozens of moneysaving U.P. programs ranging from life insurance to auto services discounts.

### **THAT BAGEL CAN GET YOU BUSTED! MILITARY REISSUES MEMO WARNING OF POPPY SEED HAVOC ON DRUG TESTS**

The Department of Defense is reminding those subject to drug testing that the consumption of poppy seed products could result in a codeine positive urinalysis result, as recent data suggests that certain poppy seed varieties may have higher codeine contamination than previously believed. Poppy

seeds may give confections and cuisines such as bagels, rolls, cakes and muffins that extra “little something,” but they could end up leaving a bad taste in your mouth if you have a drug test as part of your job.

It has been well documented that poppy seeds may be contaminated with morphine and codeine during harvest. While measures to significantly reduce the possibility of a positive drug test are being examined, avoiding foods containing poppy seeds remains the best policy. The DOD has stated it will revise its poppy seed policy once the issue is further explored, but no timetable has been provided.

### **KEEP HQ UPDATED WITH YOUR LATEST CONTACT INFO**

As a reminder, you should keep the Union updated with your current contact information including mailing and email address. If you haven't filled out an M.E.B.A. Database Update Form – or if your information has changed – grab the form off the M.E.B.A. website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)) located in the “Documents & Member Notices” section. Update Forms should be sent to the HQ Membership Dept. by e-mail ([membership@mebaunion.org](mailto:membership@mebaunion.org)) or even regular mail. The HQ database is NOT LINKED to the databases at the M.E.B.A. Plans office in Baltimore OR the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School. To update your information with Plans, you can find the “M.E.B.A. Address Change Form” on the Plans website ([www.mebaplans.org](http://www.mebaplans.org)) under “Forms, Documents & Notices” then “Medical Plan Forms.”

### **BERYL KNOCKED OUT POWER IN HOUSTON HALL**

Hurricane Beryl, which touched down in Texas on Monday, left a mess in its wake in the Lone Star State and kept our Houston hall shuttered this week. The widespread power outages coupled with soaring temperatures across the city blacked out our Houston hall leaving it unable to open this week, so far. The membership meeting was postponed until tomorrow (Friday at 1315 local time) but the meeting is contingent on whether power can be restored.

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

Friday, July 12 – **Honolulu@1100**; **Houston@1315** (if possible).

Monday, August 5 – **Boston@1200**; **Seattle (Fife)@1300**.

Tuesday, August 6 – **CMES@1430**; **Charleston@1400**; **Houston@1315**; **Oakland@1230**.

Wednesday, August 7 – **Jacksonville@1300**; **New Orleans@1315**; **Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting)** – Register by emailing [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org)

Thursday, August 8 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230**; **NY/NJ@1300**; **Norfolk@1300**; **Tampa@1300**.

Friday, August 9 – **Honolulu@1100**

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

