

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*



## M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

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In this issue//Patriot is Apparent Winner for Watson-Class LMSRs//Maritime Labor Wants to Help Follow Through on Maritime Revitalization//MLA Issues Call to Vaccinate Mariners//PRO Act Passes House, Senate Passage Unlikely//Alaska Lawmakers Suggest "Workaround" to PVSA to Let Cruise Ships Sail in the Last Frontier//Gen. Van Ovost Nominated to Head USTRANSCOM//TSA Reminder on Masking Up on Public Transport//Deadline for Comments on Fate of NS SAVANNAH//Pandemic Exacerbating Mental Health at Sea//Gleason Day Next Week//

### **M.E.B.A.-CONTRACTED PATRIOT IS "APPARENT WINNER" OF WATSON-CLASS BID**

Ship manager Patriot Contract Services, LLC is the apparent winner of the bid for the eight Watson-class government-owned Large, Medium-Speed, Roll-On, Roll-Off (LMSR) vessels. M.E.B.A./MM&P/SIU/SUP/MFOW/ARA mariners have done an excellent job crewing these vessels for the past seven years, under Patriot's stewardship, and continue to deliver for the Military Sealift Command.

The Watson-class LMSRs include the USNS WATSON, USNS SISLER, USNS DAHL, USNS RED CLOUD, USNS CHARLTON, USNS WATKINS, USNS POMEROY and USNS SODERMAN.

A 90-day extension of the existing contract is being finalized to help facilitate the transition. Patriot told their mariners, "Your part in all this is to stay focused, to continue your high performance and reinforce the MSC's decision to want us on their team."

Two other Government bids, of note, are still in process including a 6-vessel bid for five BOBO-class vessels (along with the Shughart-class USNS STOCKHAM), and the T-AGOS Ocean Surveillance ships (5 vessels) combined with the T-AGM Missile Range Instrumentation Ships (2 vessels).

### **MARITIME LABOR READY FOR FOLLOW-THROUGH ON PLAN TO BOOST U.S. MERCHANT MARINE**

Six maritime labor unions, including the M.E.B.A., have issued a letter with appreciative comments for the President's praise of the U.S. Merchant Marine and have pledged assistance to the Administration in developing a national maritime policy that will solidify U.S.-flag shipping. M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac, along with the leaders of MM&P, AMO, SIU, SUP and MFOW, thanked the President for his many heartening comments calling for investment in the U.S.-flag maritime industry, and made suggestions to help facilitate its revitalization.

The President's recent "Buy America" Executive Order is a good start. It directs federal agencies to closely adhere to domestic preference rules including compliance of the Jones Act.

The maritime union leaders noted, “We believe that with your leadership and support, and with the support of Members of Congress, we now have the opportunity to develop an effective national maritime policy that increases the number of vessels operating under the U.S.-flag, the amount of cargo carried aboard U.S.-flag ships, and the number of jobs for American merchant mariners.”

The letter has been posted on the M.E.B.A. website and can be viewed at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)

### **MLA: PROTECT THE SUPPLY CHAIN – VACCINATE MARINERS!**

The Maritime Labor Alliance - a five-union coalition made up of the M.E.B.A. ARA, IBU, ILWU and the MM&P - recently issued a statement stressing the necessity of vaccinating U.S. mariners quickly against COVID-19 to protect the supply chain. Mariners working aboard passenger vessels such as ferries and those employed in the Government fleet have received a higher priority, but MLA says, “the vast majority of merchant mariners are excluded, along with other critical supply chain port workers.”

MLA asks that the federal government make stepped-up efforts to ensure that “60,000 frontline longshore workers” along with “20,000 U.S. citizen merchant mariners” receive immediate access to the COVID-19 vaccine. An outbreak affecting crews or longshore workers could jeopardize ship missions and help halt the flow of commercial and military cargoes.

The MLA unions offered to work with employers and appropriate government agencies to assist with vaccine distribution for longshore workers and merchant mariners. “Our numbers are not great,” they said, “but we play an outsized role in maintaining the economic and military security of our nation. Our harbors must not be backed up and commerce interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis must be addressed now.”

The letter has been posted on the M.E.B.A. website and can be viewed at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)

### **PRO ACT PASSES HOUSE, SENATE PASSAGE UNLIKELY**

The Protecting the Right to Organize Act, better known as the PRO Act, was passed by the House this week but doesn’t appear poised to clear the Senate. It would revamp labor laws to beef-up collective bargaining rights and otherwise strengthen the hand of workers while weakening so-called right-to-work laws. It would impose penalties on employers who interfere with worker rights to form a union and eliminate many obstacles companies use to prevent workers from having a real voice on the job.

It passed the House last night, largely along party lines in a 225 to 206 vote. However, passage in the Senate would require the bill to meet a 60-vote threshold, which it doesn’t appear to have, to override the filibuster. With little Republican support on the Senate side, it appears headed for disappointment - absent a change in filibuster rules.

In a press release, the Biden Administration noted that unions give workers a stronger voice in the workplace to increase wages, improve job quality, protect job security, protect against discrimination and harassment, and protect workers’ health, safety and benefits. The administration also made clear that the policy of the U.S. government, under law, is to encourage union organizing and collective bargaining.

## **BILLS WOULD PERMIT ALASKAN CRUISE SHIPS TO SAIL DESPITE CANADIAN PORT CLOSURES**

On February 4<sup>th</sup>, Transport Canada announced an Interim Order to prohibit passenger vessels carrying more than 100 people from operating in Canadian waters until February 28, 2022. In response, Alaskan Senators Lisa Murkowski (R) and Dan Sullivan (R), as well as Representative Don Young (R-AK) introduced Senate and House bills for a temporary workaround by deeming roundtrip voyages between the states of Alaska and Washington as “foreign voyages” under U.S. law.

Currently, the Passenger Vessel Service Act (PSVA) prohibits foreign-flagged cruise ships from allowing passengers to board at one U.S. port and immediately disembarking at another U.S. port. While Congressman Young’s legislation was offered as an amendment to the recent COVID-19 economic relief package, the language was not included and did not advance.

However, Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Ranking Member Sam Graves (R-MO) of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee leadership recently penned a bipartisan letter to the Ambassador of Canada to the United States encouraging the government of Canada and the U.S. to “find a mutually agreeable solution.” In the letter, the committee proposed permitting stops in Canada without disembarking passengers, serving as a technical fix to meet the cabotage requirements.

“It is our hope that this solution would both address the important health concerns of Canadian authorities and allow cruises to resume with the approval of the U.S. Government authorities when it is deemed safe to do so,” the Committee members wrote to the Ambassador.

## **GEN. VAN OVOST NOMINATED AS NEXT COMMANDER AT USTRANSCOM**

Upon Senate confirmation, Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost will succeed Gen. Stephen Lyons as the Commander of the U.S. Transportation Command. Gen. Van Ovost, who currently heads up the Air Mobility Command, was nominated to the position on Saturday by the President. USTRANSCOM is responsible for the global, joint movement of combat units and sustainment cargo.

Gen. Van Ovost spent much of her early career as a test pilot, then served as Air Force staff director, Vice Director of the Joint Staff and deputy director for politico-military affairs for the Joint Staff.

## **TSA REMINDER ON MASKING UP FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

The Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) issued a reminder, earlier this week, that travelers using public transport must still mask up, even as certain states begin to relax COVID-19 facemask mandates. To help protect our frontline transport workers and each other, this applies to ferries, planes and trains, in addition to transit facilities corresponding to seaports, airports, bus and rail terminals, marinas, and metro stations.

## **INT’L SHIPPING SUPPORTS IMO DECARBONIZATION “MOON-SHOT”**

Shipping organizations representing the lion’s share of the world’s merchant fleet are supporting an International Maritime Organization plan for a \$5 billion “moon-shot” to help global shipping meet IMO decarbonization goals.

Groups representing entities accounting for more than 80% of global trade, including BIMCO, CLIA, INTERCARGO, the International Chamber of Shipping INTERTANKO, and the World Shipping Council, are onboard with an IMO plan to set up a \$5 billion fund for vital research and development to help achieve goals for zero-emission ships by 2030. They called on governments to “be on the right

side of history” and take the proposal forward at a critical meeting in June with a view to approve it in November.

The organizations noted that decarbonization can only take place with a significant acceleration of R&D, since zero-carbon technologies don’t yet exist, at scale, that can be applied to large ocean-going ships.

### **DEADLINE FOR COMMENTS ON FATE OF NUCLEAR SHIP SAVANNAH**

Only a few days remain to submit comments about the future of the N/S SAVANNAH, a former commercial nuclear ship in the Maritime Administration’s care. The SAVANNAH was the world's first nuclear-powered merchant ship – built to carry cargo and passengers – and was crewed by M.E.B.A. officers back in its heyday in the 1960s. It has been out of service since 1972 and the fuel has been removed. MarAd continues to work on the decommissioning of the ship’s reactor. The SAVANNAH was designated a National Historic Landmark and is berthed in Baltimore, MD.

MarAd had intended that the SAVANNAH become a museum ship in some fashion once the power plant is fully decommissioned. However, the agency is seeking input as to alternative proposals keeping in mind the historic significance of the ship. However, the ship’s historic status does not preclude its possible dismantling by a ship recycler in the future and that remains a possible option.

They ask for comments to be submitted by March 15, 2021. This is listed as DOT Docket Number MARAD–2020–0133 on the Federal eRulemaking Portal (<http://www.regulations.gov>) The email is [Rulemakings.MARAD@dot.gov](mailto:Rulemakings.MARAD@dot.gov). For further information contact Erhard Koehler at (202) 680–2066 or via email at [marad.history@dot.gov](mailto:marad.history@dot.gov).

### **PANDEMIC EXACERBATING MENTAL HEALTH AT SEA**

Mental health problems among global seafarers are getting worse rather than better, an industry report released this week affirms. Mental Health Support Solutions (MHSS), an organization that supplies mental health support at sea and ashore, said that over the three months ending in February 2021, anxiety among those onboard ship remained a growing issue with burnout and depression being widely reported in the first month of the study. The pandemic has created additional challenges for mariners including fear and worry about their health, financial hardships, limited interaction with others, and restrictions while on board.

Analysis of data generated from the study showed that there has been an increase in shipmaster requests for counselling support as Asian crew members top the list of nationalities most affected. According to MHSS, burnout and depression require a sustained and long-term approach to treatment, so these problems are likely to rise again as they are re-triggered by events. December saw an increase in counselling interaction and out of the three months, generated the highest level of critical incidents. Reports related to COVID-19 relating to anxiety, fatigue and worry about external factors, are also on the rise – a correlation MHSS confirmed. They said there has also been an increased reporting of incidents by Eastern European crew, with the incidents spanning all severity levels from critical to low.

### **HOLIDAY CLOSINGS NEXT WEEK**

All M.E.B.A. East and Gulf Coast halls and offices (not including Headquarters) will be closed on Wednesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> in observance of Teddy Gleason Day. Thomas “Teddy” Gleason was the President of the International Longshoremen's Association from 1963 to 1987. He died in 1992 at the

age of 92. St. Patty's Day was selected as the day to honor the life and legacy of Gleason, one of our greatest trade unionists.

**ONLINE APRIL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS – (All times are local)**

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

**Tuesday, April 6** – CMES@1430 (*CMES Meeting will be conducted in-person*);  
Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;

**Wednesday, April 7** – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

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

**Friday, April 9** – Honolulu@1100

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*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). Visit us on Facebook. 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.*