

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"
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U.S. MARITIME UNIONS SOUND ALARM OVER POTENTIAL JONES ACT WAIVER

President Donald Trump is considering a waiver of the Jones Act in response to rising gas prices following the recent Iranian strikes. As members know, such a move would have no impact on domestic oil prices. No action has been taken at press time, though the Jones Act often becomes a topic of speculation and overreaction in situations like this.

U.S.-flag shipping interests point out that a Jones Act waiver would not affect the price of gasoline at the pump. They note that substituting foreign-flagged tanker capacity for U.S.-flag tanker capacity would, in fact, end up increasing costs, since foreign-flagged rates are currently higher than Jones Act rates due to the situation in the Strait of Hormuz. The recent dramatic increase in gasoline prices is overwhelmingly driven by the worldwide increase in crude oil prices. Before the Iran operations, the price of crude oil accounted for approximately 47% of the price of gasoline at the pump. With the substantial increase in crude oil costs – rising from approximately \$70/barrel several weeks ago to well over \$90/barrel now. Even in normal times, studies have shown that the maximum potential impact of domestic shipping on the cost of gasoline nationwide is approximately one tenth of a cent per gallon, an infinitesimal amount. There is also evidence that any even miniscule gain in savings is pocketed by the oil traders, not passed on to consumers at the pump.

In addition, an unnecessary Jones Act waiver outsources American jobs and undermines American security. Waiving the Jones Act when American vessels are available means outsourcing American maritime jobs to foreign companies and mariners. This waiver is not needed for the interests of national security, and it could not come at a worse time. Allowing more, particularly unvetted, foreign tankers into U.S. ports at a time of heightened security makes America's ports, infrastructure and energy supply more vulnerable to sabotage.

Any potential waivers of cabotage laws, including the Jones Act, must adhere strictly to existing regulations, with clear parameters and transparent processes. While maritime labor has always supported waivers necessary for national security, it strongly opposes any unwarranted or politically motivated exceptions. Maritime labor unions released a statement pointing out that "Jones Act waivers are granted only in rare, exceptional circumstances, typically on national security grounds where U.S.-flag vessel capacity is unavailable."

They further noted that the recent establishment of the Tanker Security Program further guarantees U.S.-flag bottom tanker capacity when needed. The letter states, “At a time when the Administration is working to strengthen our nation’s shipyards and expand the international U.S.-flag fleet under the recently unveiled Maritime Action Plan (MAP), a Jones Act waiver would undermine these core policy objectives.” The text of the letter has been posted on the M.E.B.A. homepage available [here](#).

Sam Norton, the CEO of M.E.B.A.-contracted company Overseas Shipholding Group, recently penned an Op-Ed entitled, “Waiving the Jones Act Won’t Lower Gas Prices — Tanker Markets Prove It.”

He noted that blaming the Jones Act for rising U.S. gasoline prices is misguided. Using tanker pricing benchmarks from the Worldscale Association, he contends that replacing U.S.-flag Jones Act tankers with foreign-flag vessels on domestic routes could actually raise, not lower, the delivered cost of fuel. The piece concludes that policy decisions about fuel prices should be grounded in the realities of global shipping markets rather than mistaken assumptions and kneejerk reactions. He noted, “For those genuinely interested in reducing fuel costs for consumers, it is essential to understand how freight markets actually function. Policy decisions based on assumptions rather than market realities risk doing more harm than good.”

This week, President Trump announced the U.S. would tap into 172 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, in response to skyrocketing gas prices. Also, the International Energy Agency announced Wednesday that its member countries will release a combined 400 million barrels of oil from strategic reserves — the largest coordinated drawdown in the group’s history.

MEMBERS ELECT SIX-PERSON FRC AT MARCH MEETINGS

Members at the regular March meetings elected a six-person rank-and-file Financial Review Committee to examine Union finances in April. The FRC is a democratic safeguard adopted by the M.E.B.A. in the mid-1990s to ensure transparency. The Committee, which meets annually, will assemble at M.E.B.A. Headquarters on April 21 to spend three days reviewing last year’s Union finances (2025 calendar year). This year, Committee members will include Raymond Collector (Houston), Joseph Ajar (NY/NJ), Jordan Reidelbach (Norfolk), Tim Cogan (Oakland), Chris Schneider (Seattle) and Mike Martykan (Tampa).

The elected Union members will travel to M.E.B.A. Headquarters in Washington D.C. on Monday, April 20, 2026. They will begin their work at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 21, 2026 in the Conference Room at M.E.B.A. Headquarters. It is anticipated that the business of the FRC will be completed by Thursday, April 23 with travel home scheduled for Friday, April 24. Their report will be reviewed and voted upon by members at the May membership meetings.

COAST GUARD CLEARING ICE FOR START OF GREAT LAKES SHIPPING SEASON

The Coast Guard has begun spring ice-breaking operations in the Upper Great Lakes in advance of the planned opening of the Lakes shipping season on March 25. Coast Guard Sector Northern Great Lakes began clearing ice in Duluth, Minnesota, on Monday as well as the St. Marys River. Initial activity focused around the Duluth Harbor, south of Munuscong (Mud) Lake and the Middle Neebish Channel north and east of Neebish Island. Ice-breaking activities will follow in the southern half of the West Neebish Channel, and from the Mud Lake Junction Light northward to Moon Island.

The targeted opening of the Soo Locks is scheduled for March 25, 2026. Coast Guard ice-breaking activities will encompass all navigable waters on the St. Marys River, the Straits of Mackinac and Green Bay.

M.E.B.A. mariners working for Interlake have been spending the last months working aboard company vessels as needed under M.E.B.A. contract during the winter layup at various shipyards & docks in and around the Great Lakes.

MATSON TO DEPLOY CARGO SECURITY PLAN

In response to the rise intermodal cargo theft industrywide, Matson, Inc. partnered with BNSF Railway and War-Lok to introduce a new, enhanced cargo security program that will add two layers of protection to the majority of its international intermodal cargo.

Matson will deploy War-Lok security devices on every international container moving from Los Angeles to all BNSF network destinations including Chicago, Memphis, and Dallas, delivering the first new layer of cargo protection. The program also features a unique agreement with BNSF Railway to position Matson containers in the lower well of international intermodal rail cars, enhancing security from Los Angeles to Chicago. The same protection will apply to cargo moving through the Chicago gateway to select Eastern U.S. destinations up to the BNSF interchange point.

“Matson has a long history of industry leadership and pioneering customer focused innovation, and this is the latest example,” said John Lauer, Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer. “We’re raising the bar with what we believe to be the most comprehensive carrier-led intermodal security program in the market — setting a new standard for cargo protection. While no security system can eliminate all risk, these added measures significantly reduce exposure to theft and reinforce Matson’s commitment to protecting customer cargo throughout the inland journey,” Lauer said.

COMMERCIAL SHIP ATTACKS INTENSIFY; PRESIDENT COMMENTS

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) claimed responsibility for at least six attacks on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz in the past few days. Several of the attacks took place in Iraqi waters where explosive-laden boats were suspected of striking the vessels and igniting a fire that killed at least one crew member. At least four other attacks were reported on Wednesday in the Strait of Hormuz. In a video released by the IRGC, a man is heard mistakenly celebrating the destruction of an American tanker and pledging allegiance to Iran’s supreme leader.

President Donald Trump is urging commercial vessels to continue transiting the Strait of Hormuz despite the wave of attacks that has sharply increased the risks for merchant shipping in the Persian Gulf. Speaking in an interview with Fox News, Trump said shipowners should not be intimidated by the recent violence. “These ships should go through the Strait of Hormuz and show some guts,” he said, adding that Iran’s naval capabilities have been neutralized.

The remarks come as security conditions in the region have deteriorated rapidly. According to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, at least 20 incidents involving commercial vessels were reported between February 28 and March 12, including 16 confirmed attacks across the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Gulf of Oman.

The violence has already taken a toll on civilian crews, at least eight seafarers have been killed in recent attacks on merchant vessels. The worsening security situation has also disrupted maritime traffic. Ship tracking data shows transits through the Strait of Hormuz dropping as operators reassess risks, leaving hundreds of vessels waiting in Gulf waters. Industry groups including the International Chamber of Shipping warn that thousands of seafarers remain exposed to growing dangers while carrying out the work that keeps global trade and energy supplies moving. The International Chamber of Shipping said civilian crews are being exposed to significant danger while performing work essential to global commerce.

PLAN FOR MARITIME REINSURANCE IN GULF

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) CEO Ben Black and U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced agreement on a detailed implementation plan to deploy Maritime Reinsurance, including war risk, in the Gulf region. In close coordination with U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the plan is designed to restore confidence in maritime trade, help stabilize international commerce, and support American and allied businesses operating in the Middle East during the conflict with Iran.

DFC reinsurance facility will insure losses up to approximately \$20 billion on a rolling basis. This revolving insurance offering will apply only to vessels that meet the criteria. Insurance will focus on Hull & Machinery and Cargo to start.

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

Monday, April 6 – *Closed. Jesse Calhoun Day (Observed)*

Tuesday, April 7 – **Boston@1200; CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

Wednesday, April 8 – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing mebahq@mebaunion.org**

Thursday, April 9 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

Friday, April 10 – **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