

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

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



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

*The Official Union Newsletter – "The Word to the Wise"*

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### **UNION HAS BEEN KEEPING MEMBERS INFORMED ABOUT LATEST COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS**

The Union has forwarded a series of All Ports Bulletins and guidance to each of our Union halls and offices regarding the latest information and developments stemming from the ongoing pandemic. In addition, members, applicants and retirees with their email address on file with Headquarters have been receiving emails containing valuable information related to the hiring halls, M.E.B.A. Benefits Plans and other M.E.B.A. intensive news.

If you want to ensure that you are part of the contact list receiving future updates, please visit the M.E.B.A. website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)) and update your contact information using an M.E.B.A. Database Update Form.

### **MSC HOSPITAL SHIPS WILL BREAKOUT TO BATTLE AGAINST OUTBREAK**

The two Military Sealift Command Hospital Ships have been ordered to deploy in the fight against the novel coronavirus. The USNS COMFORT is in its Norfolk, VA berth readying for its latest mission, this one to New York Harbor to provide medical services to help lessen the burden on coast-wide hospitals treating COVID-19 cases. The San Diego-berthed USNS MERCY will also reportedly join the fight in service on the West Coast. Both are poised to rapidly respond to emergent crises. The ships found a role in Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. The COMFORT provided medical treatment to victims of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and both ships have traveled the world on countless humanitarian and relief missions. Civilian Mariners onboard both vessels are represented by the M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU.

The vessels will help address concerns that an intensification of the pandemic in the U.S. could create hospital bed and ventilator shortages. Each ship has a 1,000 bed capacity. The Defense Department said that the hospital ships could be utilized to address non-COVID-19 cases in order to free up civilian hospitals to better focus on those affected by the virus.

The COMFORT is currently in a maintenance period which reportedly will be expedited to get the ship readied for action, which could take several weeks. The MERCY is closer to readiness and could sail to Seattle or another coastal port within a week.

### **ILWU's WESLEY FURTADO: GONE TOO SOON**

M.E.B.A. expressed its sorrow and sympathy to the ILWU following the news that the union's longtime International Vice President, Hawaii Wes Furtado passed away at the age of 64. Wes had served in that position for the last 20 years following a distinguished career on the waterfront in Local 142. He served as a shop steward, a waterfront worker, longshore unit officer, and a negotiating committee member. As a rank and file member, he was an effective organizer working on various initiatives in Hawaii. Once his service as an elected official began, he remained popular with members and was easily returned to office in each election. He was involved in local labor organizations and participated in the Maritime Labor Alliance with the M.E.B.A. and other maritime unions.

M.E.B.A. extended condolences to ILWU members and President Willie Adams calling Wes "an unshakeable soldier for the ILWU and labor movement. His devotion and tireless advocacy for working people and their families was fueled by his passion for the ILWU membership. Affable, dynamic and devoted, his contributions to the well-being of working men and women will never be forgotten. We have lost a great union leader."

### **AFL-CIO CORONAVIRUS RESOURCE PAGE**

The AFL-CIO has compiled a Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic resource page with valuable information and updates. (Visit <https://tinyurl.com/tlwtdmc>). The site is a clearinghouse for important news and guidance regarding the outbreak and provides links to all AFL-CIO affiliates.

### **CMES CLOSURE AS COVID-19 DIRECTIVES DISRUPT CONTINUED CLASSES**

Updating an earlier notice that informed members and applicants about the cancellation of upcoming courses through April in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School (CMES) has suspended ongoing classes and closed the campus for training and events. The action was taken in respect to growing travel restrictions and in compliance with recent directives issued by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan.

All students are leaving today or making plans for Friday morning departures. During this period of closure, the School will be staffed by essential personnel needed to maintain campus security, address facility emergencies, handle external communications, and manage its financial responsibilities.

### **WWII MARINER BILL HAS BEEN SIGNED INTO LAW**

Last Friday, the President put his pen to H.R. 5671 and signed the WWII mariner Gold Medal bill into law, after a tireless fight by U.S. shipping interests and several key lawmakers including Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) and Sen Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) to get these heroes recognized.

The Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor bestowed by Congress, will be awarded to the WWII U.S. Merchant Marine. A single gold medal of appropriate design will be created and placed on display in the American Merchant Marine Museum at the Academy in Kings Point, NY. Duplicates will then be created and made available to the public. M.E.B.A. will be working with the Maritime Administration and the American Merchant Marine Veterans (AMMV) on plans to create the reproductions of the Gold Medal.

## **NOLA HALL CLOSES DOORS FOR TIME BEING**

Due to specific safety and health concerns of our staff at the New Orleans Union hall in the context of the ongoing pandemic, M.E.B.A.'s hall on Carondelet Street will be closed until further notice as of yesterday (3/18/20).

New Orleans hall business should be referred to our Union halls in Tampa at (813) 247-7223 - [tampa@mebaunion.org](mailto:tampa@mebaunion.org)) or Houston at (713) 923-9424 - [houston@mebaunion.org](mailto:houston@mebaunion.org).

## **SHALE DRILLERS LOOKING TO SIDESTEP JONES ACT**

Oil and natural gas interests hit hard by the oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia are seeking permission to bypass the Jones Act. The American Exploration & Production Council (AXPC), representing 26 independent oil and natural gas companies, penned a letter to Congressional leaders with the request. AXPC stressed that they are not seeking a federal bail-out, but are looking for "market-based solutions" they say will help alleviate the imbalance caused by the oversupply from global oil markets. One such solution, they say, would involve "temporary waivers to the Jones Act" which "can allow American producers to move domestic products with greater ease within the U.S."

In the same statement urging lawmakers to waive the Jones Act in order to pivot to foreign-run interests, AXPC also mentioned that they "support American workers across multiple sectors impacted by recent events to help stimulate the economy."

M.E.B.A. President Marshall Ainley and other maritime union and organization leaders issued a strongly worded letter opposing such a waiver. The letter was sent to Chairs and Ranking Members of the House Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure, and House Armed Services. It was also signed by SUP President Dave Connolly, MM&P President Don Marcus, AMO President Paul Doell, MFOW President Anthony Poplawski, SIU President Mike Sacco, IBU President Marina Secchitano, MTD Secretary-Treasurer Dan Duncan and TTD President Larry Willis.

"At a time when American workers and their families are facing economic hardship," the letter read, "the public health crisis should not be exploited to the benefit of foreign-flagged industries that do not employ American workers, avoid paying U.S. taxes, pay substandard wages to their foreign employees and want to use these hard times to break into our nation's vital industries. We oppose any efforts to waive the Jones Act that would undermine the wellbeing of American mariners and the domestic maritime workforce. When this crisis is over, irresponsibly weakening the fundamental laws governing the U.S. maritime industry would only contribute to the growing loss of American jobs to foreign interests."

## **CG MSIBs: MMCs, MED CERTS EXTENDED, RECs CLOSED**

The M.E.B.A. has posted the latest Coast Guard Marine Safety Information Bulletins on our website ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)) including the actions taken by the agency related to mariner credentials and medical certificates. Among other things, Regional Exam Centers have been closed until further notice and certain expiring mariner documents have been extended for another three months. Specifically:

- Regional Exam Centers and Monitoring Units. Regional Examination Centers and Monitoring Units will be closed until further notice effective immediately. Mariners may cancel or reschedule any REC appointment by contacting NMC's Customer Service Center at 1-888-IASKNMC, by emailing [IASKNMC@uscg.mil](mailto:IASKNMC@uscg.mil), or through the NMC online chat system. This includes appointments for application submission, payment of fees associated with an application, or appointments for examinations.
- National Endorsements: Merchant Mariner Credentials (MMC) and Medical Certificates (National Endorsements only) that expired between March 1, 2020 and July 31, 2020 are extended until 31 October 2020. Mariners who are actively working on expired credentials that meet the expiration criteria must carry the expired credential with a copy of this notice.
- STCW Endorsements: MMCs with STCW endorsements that expired between March 1, 2020 and July 31, 2020 are extended until 31 October 2020. Mariners who are actively working on expired credentials that meet the expiration criteria must carry the expired credential with a copy of this notice.
- STCW Medical Certificates: STCW Medical Certificates are valid for 3 months from the expiration date in accordance with STCW Regulation I/9. Mariners who are actively working on expired medical certificate that meet the expiration criteria must carry the expired certificate with a copy of this notice.

The complete notice can be viewed on M.E.B.A.'s website. Members and applicants affected by these newly announced mitigation efforts should be sure to have a copy of the letter to be kept with their credentials at all times.

### **NOAA HALTING SAILINGS DURING CRISIS**

To minimize the potential exposure of employees to COVID-19 and prevent the spread of the virus, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is implementing a 30-day suspension of sailing operations. Ships underway are returning to port and an orderly ramp down is being conducted to suspend sailing operations. M.E.B.A. represents the engine officers aboard the vessels in the NOAA fleet.

### **OPPOSITION TO BAIL-OUT OF FOREIGN-FLAG CRUISE INDUSTRY**

The economic suffering afflicted by the onset of the coronavirus has prompted cruise industry lobbyists to urge lawmakers to consider an economic package to offset their loss of business. Though some Florida politicians as well as President Trump and Vice President Pence have echoed sentiments in support of such a notion, U.S.-flag interests are serving up a dose of reality to those who may not understand the situation as clearly.

"They aren't American," the Chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Rep. Peter DeFazio said of the cruise companies. "They don't pay taxes in the United States of America. If they want to re-flag their ships ... and pay U.S. wages and pay U.S. taxes, then maybe."

There is only one large U.S.-flag cruise ship in operation – NCL's PRIDE OF AMERICA, the rest are largely registered under flags of convenience.

MM&P (and Maritime Labor Alliance) President Don Marcus said that, “We should not give one dime in stimulus money to ‘flag-of-convenience’ party boats...they should be the last on the list for a federal bailout.”

President Marcus concluded, “If Congress and the White House want to protect American interests, foster an economic recovery, and help the maritime community, monies would be better spent assisting ferry systems such as the Alaska Marine Highway System now taking a double blow from the economic downturn and the decline in oil revenue. Assistance also should be offered to commuter ferries such as the Washington State Ferries and Staten Island Ferry that have suffered a loss of commuter traffic. The domestic ferry systems employ American workers, and they are an essential part of our transportation infrastructure. The virus crisis and our dependence on foreign trade also highlights our nation’s overreliance on foreign cargo fleets, especially those of China, Hong Kong and South Korea. Congress should increase incentives for cargo vessels that fly the American flag for reasons of both national security and the free flow of commerce.”

### **UNION CONTRACTS KEEP MEMBERS SAFER**

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights inequalities in U.S. between those who can more easily follow Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations to stay home and seek medical attention when needed and those who cannot. The pandemic sheds light on another difference in economic security and access to medical care among workers: the benefits of being in a union.

Union workers are more likely to have access to paid sick days and health insurance on the job than non-union workers. Only two-thirds of non-union workers have health insurance from work compared to 94% of union workers. With labor constantly under attack by the federal government and corporate interests, the worker protections and benefits that a union contract affords should never be taken for granted.

### **OSG COMPLETES ATC ACQUISITION**

Overseas Shipholding Group, Inc. has purchased and assumed control of Alaska Tanker Company, including three ATC Jones Act tankers currently in operation. ATC had been an entity jointly owned by Keystone Shipping, OSG Ship Management and BP Shipping.

OSG said its subsidiaries completed the purchase of the U.S.-flagged crude oil carrier vessels ALASKAN EXPLORER, ALASKAN LEGEND and ALASKAN NAVIGATOR from BP Oil and entered into a bareboat charter with BP for a fourth vessel, the ALASKAN FRONTIER. M.E.B.A. officers continue to crew the vessels.

In related news, ATC President and CEO Anil Mathur has stepped down and will be succeeded by Chris Merten who will run ATC as a wholly-owned OSG subsidiary. Mathur will continue in an advisory role.

### **OCEAN GIANT WRAPS-UP DEEP FREEZE OFFLOAD**

The M.E.B.A.-crewed heavylift vessel M/V OCEAN GIANT, a Waterman-managed ship that was contracted by the Military Sealift Command., has completed Operation Deep Freeze (ODF) cargo offload operations in Port Hueneme, Calif. The operation was part of MSC’s annual resupply mission to scientists at McMurdo Station, Antarctica. The offload was the final step in OCEAN GIANT’s support of ODF. Their mission began in late December.

The M.E.B.A. crew included Chief Engineer Dave Morris, 1s A/E Devin Savoie and 2nd A/E Nicholas Cabral along with MM&P deck officers and an SIU unlicensed crew.

#### **APRIL MEETINGS CANCELED, FRC POSTPONED**

The ongoing pandemic and state of emergency have created safety and travel concerns that have prompted M.E.B.A.'s District Executive Committee to cancel the upcoming April membership meetings and postpone, for now, the formation of a Financial Review Committee.

A six-person rank and file FRC is annually elected at the April membership meetings around the country to examine financial records from the previous calendar year. That review will now take place later in the year when a safe and reasonable date can be reserved.

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



*The M.E.B.A. is the nation's oldest maritime labor union, established in 1875. M.E.B.A.'s expertise and proven 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.*