

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

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



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

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### **CUSTOMS WITHDRAWS JONES ACT-STRENGTHENING PROPOSAL**

A Customs and Border Protection proposal that would have helped strengthen Jones Act requirements related to the transportation of offshore oil and gas operation equipment was withdrawn by the agency this week. The initiative would have closed loopholes exploited by foreign shipping interests allowing them to transport equipment from the U.S. mainland to U.S. rigs using foreign-flag vessels. Proponents said that it would have created 1,000 U.S. mariner jobs and brought in over a dozen U.S.-flag vessels. But the proposal received fervent opposition from the oil and gas industry including the American Petroleum Institute which warred against the removal of the Jones Act exemption.

The pro-Jones Act Offshore Marine Service Association (OMSA), which supported the proposal, contested that the withdrawal was urged by the oval White House's Office of Management and Budget and called on the President to step in and put Americans first. "The offshore service industry is deeply disappointed in the Administration's decision to delay the revocation of letter rulings that would correctly enforce the Jones Act and put American mariners first," said Aaron Smith, OMSA President and CEO. "This decision...is deeply damaging to the American crews, shipyards, and companies who have waited more than eight years while the Administration studied taking corrective action. Additionally, during this time our industry has invested more than \$2 billion to ensure offshore production and exploration would not be disrupted, while foreign interests lobbied the U.S. government to promote their own economic interests through their promotion of false statements and scare tactics. We call on President Trump to take immediate action and correct these damaging rulings that have continued to put foreign companies first and American companies and workers last."

### **NEED TO GROW MARINER BASE; K.P. ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED AT SENATE HEARING**

The Maritime Administration's Acting Administrator informed a Senate Subcommittee that both MarAd and the U.S. Transportation Command have grave concerns that a sealift operation cannot be sustained beyond the initial surge because of the shortage of qualified mariners. Joel Szabat pointed out that the U.S. currently counts about 11,000 qualified mariners which would allow the opening surge. But he noted that about 13,000 qualified mariners are needed for an extended activation.

At Tuesday's hearing, Szabat told the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security that there are a number of actions that could increase the mariner base. He pointed to a recent Customs and Border Protection proposal that would help strengthen Jones Act requirements related to offshore oil and gas regulations. If implemented, he said, it could translate into the addition of 14 vessels – along with the associated mariners – into the U.S.-flag fleet. (*Note: As mentioned above, Customs has since withdrawn their earlier proposal.*) Additionally, he said a more fluid infusion of cargo and, in particular, increasing the percentage of the cargo preference requirement within the Food Aid program (from 50% to 75%) would also burgeon the number of U.S.-flag ships and their requisite mariners. He also called on strong support and strengthening of the Maritime Security Program which helps keep commercial vessels under the Stars and Stripes and makes them available in case of contingency.

U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Superintendent Rear Admiral James Helis also testified at the hearing and detailed the process that led to a Sea Year suspension. Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) questioned the necessity of the suspension and asked whether any cadets would be negatively impacted by the stand-down. The Superintendent informed the Subcommittee that he is confident that none of the affected midshipmen will be delayed from graduating due to missing Sea Year days. Szabat testified that four months after the stand-down was relaxed, eight shipping companies have been re-established into the sea year program representing about 82% of the previous program capacity.

#### **M.E.B.A. PLANS LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE**

M.E.B.A. Benefit Plans has unveiled a new and improved website today. It is available at the old website address: [www.mebaplans.org](http://www.mebaplans.org).

The new site has increased user friendly navigation and fillable forms that participants can fill out online, print, sign and mail to Plans. Please take a moment and check it out.

#### **INDUSTRY SUPPORT FOR SHIP DISCHARGE ACT**

M.E.B.A. and other maritime industry groups have been promoting bipartisan vessel discharge legislation that would help the U.S. maritime industry avoid a nightmare of conflicting federal and state regulations, as well as to head off a potentially expensive mandate on America's ports.

The Commercial Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (CVIDA), would correct a problem when the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals expanded an EPA pollution program to include ballast water and other vessel discharges. While the resulting Vessel General Permit (VGP) program essentially mirrors Coast Guard standards, it unfortunately allows states to add their own patchwork of requirements on top of federal standards. As a result, commercial vessel operators are now subject to more than 150 distinct regulatory requirements imposed by two federal agencies and more than two dozen states—some of which are impossible to meet with any existing technology.

In the Senate, Sens. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) and Bob Casey (D-PA) have put forward S.168 with a companion House version (H.R. 1154, sponsored by Reps. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) and Elijah Cummings (D-MD)).

The industry is asking Congress to enact a single, nationwide approach to provide certainty for businesses and keep interstate commerce moving. CVIDA does that by consolidating commercial vessel ballast water discharge regulations under the U.S. Coast Guard—eliminating a confusing system

administered by two federal agencies and 25 states. At the same time, the legislation would also enact a responsible, long-term policy to ensure the health of America's waterways.

### **GOOD & WELFARE AUCTION DONATIONS SOUGHT; RAFFLE ONGOING**

Raffle tickets to assist the M.E.B.A.'s Good & Welfare Fund are being snatched up at Union halls around the country with \$5,000 at stake for the winner. The \$2 tickets are currently on sale for the 50/50 Raffle that will be held on October 12<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with a Silent Auction & Fundraiser at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School. 5,000 tickets have been printed meaning that, if they sell out, the winner will receive 50% of the proceeds (\$5,000) with the other half going to the Fund. More tickets will be printed up – and the jackpot will increase – if demand continues. The raffle is open to anyone who wants to purchase a ticket. Ticketholders don't need to be present at the drawing to win. Every ticket you buy puts another dollar into the Good & Welfare Fund.

To help support the Auction & Fundraiser, the G&W Committee is asking for donations of gifts and prizes such as nautical items, sporting memorabilia, art, etc. You can contact Secretary-Treasurer Bill Van Loo at Headquarters or any Branch Agent to forward monetary or item donations. Remember, your contributions to the fund are tax deductible so please give liberally in order to help a Union brother or sister in need. M.E.B.A. members are encouraged to support this important cause. The Fund is used to help active and retired members and their families in times of crisis. It has proven itself numerous times helping members, retirees and their families recover following devastating storms and unexpected tragedies. Strengthening the G&W will allow additional support to those in the M.E.B.A. family during their times of need.

### **CELEBRATING MOM**

Mum's the word! When shopping for a Mother's Day gift, consider grabbing something off Labor 411's list of blooms, bon-bons, bubbly and beauty products. All come from ethical companies that boost the American middle class: *Flowers* – Albertsons; Vons; Pavilions; Gelson's; Costco; Ralph's; and Safeway. *Chocolates* - See's Candies; Ghirardelli; Hershey's; Russell Stover; *Champagne and Wine* – Andre; Arbor Mist; C.K. Mondavi; Charles Krug; Cook's; J. Roget; Gallo Estate; Peter Vella; Scheffield Cellars; Turning Leaf; and Wycliff. *Beauty* - Dove Soap and Beauty Products; Caress Skin Care; L'Oreal Paris; and Revlon.

### **SIGN UP FOR M.E.B.A. VACATION PLAN DIRECT DEPOSIT**

Designed for convenience, M.E.B.A. members can help themselves by taking advantage of the Vacation Plan Direct Deposit that will help save them time and ease Plans processing costs. Authorization forms are available from the Plans Office, Plans Outport Offices and at the Plans' website – [www.mebaplans.org](http://www.mebaplans.org) (Forms, Vacation). Complete details are available on the Plans' site as well. Contact (800) 811-6322 or [vacation@mebaplans.org](mailto:vacation@mebaplans.org) for more info.

### **DANGER AT SEA, PART 1 – PIRACY REPORT**

Pirates and armed robbers attacked 43 ships and captured 58 seafarers in the first quarter of 2017, slightly more than the same period last year, according to the latest International Maritime Bureau (IMB) piracy report. The global report highlights persisting violence in piracy hotspots off Nigeria and around the Southern Philippines – where two crew members were killed in February. Indonesia also reported frequent incidents, mostly low-level thefts from anchored vessels. In total, 33 vessels were boarded and four fired upon in the first three months of 2017. Armed pirates hijacked two vessels, both off the coast of Somalia, where no merchant ship had been hijacked since May 2012. Four attempted incidents were also received. In particular, the report highlighted the uptick of kidnappings

in the Gulf of Guinea, the growing violence around the Southern Philippines, and the reemergence of Somali piracy. The report gives detailed descriptions of all 43 attacks in 16 countries, and advice for mariners, including a list of particularly high-risk areas where extra caution and precautionary measures are vital.

### **DANGER AT SEA, PART 2 – MARAD ADVISORY; ACTIVITY NEAR PHILIPPINES**

The Maritime Administration has issued an advisory for shipping in waters near the Philippines after a string of worrisome incidents. The advisory urged U.S.-flag ships to stay vigilant and closely adhere to counter-piracy measures as part of their Vessel Security Plan when transiting the Sulu and Celebes Seas. Over the past year there have been at least 14 reported kidnappings and one murder. Ten of those incidents were linked to a violent Islamic separatist group (Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)) that operates in the southern Philippines. Initially, only towing and fishing vessels were targeted in the kidnappings. However, since October 2016, ASG reportedly targeted three large commercial vessels and one yacht. In November 2016 ASG boarded a German yacht and killed one of the two crewmembers and took the other hostage. Three months later they killed the hostage after a ransom demand was not met. Thus far, no U.S. vessels have been involved in these incidents.

### **DANGER AT SEA, PART 3 – MINES NEAR YEMEN**

Several months back, mines laid by Houthi rebels near Mocha, Yemen had mariners on edge when transiting in nearby waters. This week, additional mines have been spotted and authorities are again issuing advisories. The Royal Saudi Navy located a number of them bobbing close to Midi, a Red Sea port south of the Saudi-Yemen border. Last month, a Yemeni Coast Guard vessel struck a mine 40 nautical miles from the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb resulting in two deaths and eight injuries.

### **REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS**

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

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

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

*Thursday, June 8* – L.A.@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

*Friday, June 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 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). For publication and related inquiries contact: Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – [marco@mebaunion.org](mailto:marco@mebaunion.org)*