

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"
M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES
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M.E.B.A. WINS MARAD RESTRICTION ARBITRATION

An arbitrator's ruling agreed with the M.E.B.A. that members restricted to ship during COVID quarantines on turbo activated Ready Reserve Force vessels in 2021 are entitled to restriction-to-ship compensation, pay initially denied by the Maritime Administration.

Though MarAd had paid the premium rate during a previous ship confinement in 2020, it informed ship managers, including M.E.B.A.-contracted Keystone, that it would no longer award such pay after January 2021 calling the cost "wholly inappropriate, completely unreasonable and totally unexpected."

The Union argued that the M.E.B.A. contract specifies that members confined aboard the Keystone-managed RRF vessels during the turbo activation in August 2021 were entitled to premium pay. MarAd's "gangway up" directives in these instances confined mariners onboard their vessels until the end of the turbo activation, drastically reducing mariner quality of life. M.E.B.A. Gulf Coast V.P. Adam Smith and M.E.B.A. HQ Contracts Officer Mark Gallagher testified on behalf of our members.

Section 16D, a longstanding provision of the M.E.B.A. Dry Cargo Agreement, mandates premium pay when shore leave is denied for any reason, barring certain exceptions. The MarAd MOU spells out exceptions to paying the premium rate when denying mariners shore leave if the vessel is in "remote and hostile environments."

The company, invoking various equitable considerations, further argued against these payments contending that the quarantine fell beyond their control, employees were not actively working during the quarantine, and the situation lacked predictability.

However, the arbitrator ruled that the contractual language takes precedence and noted that circumstances did not align with the exception as the quarantine occurred in U.S. ports and did not constitute a "remote and hostile environment" as stipulated. Thus, premium pay was deemed applicable, and the mariners will be fairly compensated for their company-imposed confinement.

The Arbitrator sustained the Union's grievance and directed the parties "to meet with all deliberate speed to arrive at an equitable remedy for each affected mariner."

M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac stated, "I find it incredulous that all segments of the government and military have finally realized that U.S. vessels and U.S. mariners are critical and in short supply, yet some of these same agencies refuse to maintain the minimal work/life balance of current mariners by refusing to provide annual raises or fairly compensate mariners who are restricted to their vessels - all while the government employees get their annual raises and can still work from home. The M.E.B.A. will continue to defend mariners and will always advocate for an appropriate work/life balance for mariners. For the good of our nation, we need to attract U.S. mariners and retain those we have. Treating them poorly and falsely suppressing wages is not the answer and is exactly how we got to our current state of affairs."

CBJ SHOP STEWARD TRAINING

M.E.B.A. conducted shop steward training this week in Alaska for our members in the City and Borough of Juneau bargaining unit. M.E.B.A. represents CBJ workers who toil on a wide range of city jobs including airport workers, firefighters and public work employees, among others.

The training consisted of two 2-hour sessions that involved several presentations imparting valuable information on legal rights and duties, grievances, and other aspects of their duties that will make a shop steward more effective. Each session extended long beyond the set time as attendees asked numerous questions and got the most out of the training. M.E.B.A. Washington State Ferry Representative Eric Winge attended for the Union as did our attorney Jack Holland and Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha recorded a video for the group. Savannah Fletcher and Aneliese Palmer, attorneys with AK Local Counsel, Northern Justice Project, also made presentations.

The 10 CBJ members who took advantage of the training were enthusiastic and overwhelmingly positive in their feedback for the event and are pleased with the Union's efforts on their behalf. Shop Stewards are excited for the next contract negotiations in which Secretary-Treasurer Rexha will be involved. The CBA expires at the end of June 2025.

GGF MEMBERS APPROVE MORE EQUITABLE DUES STRUCTURE

The District Executive Committee thanks our members sailing in the Golden Gate Ferry bargaining unit who exercised their right to vote in their just-concluded week-long Online Dues Equity Referendum. M.E.B.A. GGF members approved a revamped dues structure tied into their base wages that more closely mirrors the dues structure at other inland bargaining units.

M.E.B.A. represents Vessel Masters at the GGF. The seven vessels in the fleet run between the Golden Gate terminal in San Francisco, CA to Larkspur, Sausalito and Tiburon. The current contract runs until June 30, 2024. Oakland Patrolman Max Alper kept GGF members informed throughout the process. 86% of M.E.B.A. members working in the unit participated in the online vote and over 80% of eligible voters supported the measure.

The bargaining unit's approval of the dues increase provides the M.E.B.A. the resources necessary to sustain the Union's ability to represent the GGF membership for the foreseeable future at the level they deserve.

M.E.B.A. INLAND GROUPS WILL MEET AT CMES IN JUNE

M.E.B.A. will host a mid-June one-day summit at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School for members representing inland waterways and ferry bargaining units across the country. This Inland Transportation Coalition will discuss matters of mutual concern and provide education for rank & file M.E.B.A. members involved in contract negotiations, grievance resolution, union administration and maritime education.

M.E.B.A. Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha is heading up the effort and is in contact with the halls to select bargaining unit representation and participation. The meeting will take place on June 14, 2024.

Matters of discussion for the Inland group will include contracts and enforcement, political concerns, and other bargaining unit challenges as well as a discussion of strategies to help strengthen their hands.

ITC bargaining units include the Alaska Marine Highway System; Black Ball Ferry Line; Boston Marine Transport; Connolly-Pacific; Delaware Pilots' Association; DRBA (Cape May-Lewes Ferry); Golden Gate Ferry; King County Water Taxi; Lamont-Doherty; Samson Tug & Barge; Staten Island Ferry; Washington State Ferry; and the Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket Steamship Authority. These groups represent almost one third of the M.E.B.A. membership.

M.E.B.A. TAKES PART IN MTD CONVENTION

The M.E.B.A. took part in the Maritime Trades Department (MTD) Executive Board meeting which was conducted at AFL-CIO Headquarters in Washington DC last week. M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac and Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha attended for the Union. The MTD is a coalition of port councils and unions, including the M.E.B.A., that battles on behalf of U.S.-flag shipping.

The one-day meeting featured a video address by the Commander of the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) General Jaqueline Van Ovost who reiterated her unflagging support for the U.S. Merchant Marine. During her remarks she expressed support for the Jones Act, Tanker Security Program and other programs that help boost the industry.

She called sealift “the most cost-effective and efficient mode of transporting goods and supplies,” and said that “we rely on a strong maritime industrial base ensuring access to modern vessels, shipyards, repair facilities and drydocks and skilled workers.... We must prioritize expanding the fleet of American-owned, American-flagged and American-crewed vessels through reflagging foreign ships and producing our own.”

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond and SIU/MTD President David Heindel also delivered remarks as did M.E.B.A. Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha. Rex discussed the power of labor unity and the need for workers to understand their self-worth and value within a labor market to empower them to negotiate better deals. He spoke about the effort of the Staten Island Ferry mariners who recently concluded a 13-year battle that transformed the unit from the lowest to the highest paid public ferry system in the country.

CG ALLOWING EASIER MMC RENEWAL UP TO SIX YEARS AFTER EXPIRATION

The Coast Guard's Office of Merchant Mariner Credentialing has published a new policy letter (01-24) that will allow mariners to renew a merchant mariner credential (MMC) up to 6 years after its expiration without taking the complete original examination. All other credentialing requirements for renewal after expiration remain unchanged, in some circumstances an open book examination may be required.

Mariners who had previously applied for renewal of their MMC after the 1-year grace period had expired may re-apply for renewal if they are within the new, extended grace period. A new application will be necessary, including payment of required fees. If you have a current approval-to-test letter issued by the National Maritime Center (NMC) to re-instate an MMC expired beyond the 1-year administrative grace period but within 6 years, you should contact the NMC at iasknmc@uscg.mil or (888) 427-5662. The policy letter is effective immediately and will remain in effect indefinitely.

Mariners and other interested parties should contact the Mariner Credentialing Program Policy Division at MMCPolicy@uscg.mil or (202) 372-2357 with any questions or feedback.

KEEL LAYING FOR NEXT ESB

San Diego's NASSCO shipyard held a keel-laying ceremony for the future USNS HECTOR A. CAFFERATA JR., a Lewis Puller-class Expeditionary Sea Base.

The ship will be named for U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Private Hector A. Cafferata Jr., who served with distinction during the Korean War. Cafferata received the Medal of Honor from President Harry S Truman for his life-saving heroism during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir.

Expeditionary Sea Base ships are highly flexible platforms used across a broad range of military operations, supporting multiple operational phases. Acting as a mobile sea base, they are a part of the critical access infrastructure that supports deploying forces and supplies to provide prepositioned equipment and sustainment with adaptable distribution capability. Civilian Mariners in the MSC fleet are represented by the M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU.

The other ESBs in the class, USS LEWIS B. PULLER, USS HERSHEL "WOODY" WILLIAMS, USNS MIGUEL KEITH and JOHN L. CANLEY are already in service and the yard continues the construction of the USNS ROBERT E. SIMANEK.

MARITIME INDUSTRY CALLS ON UN ASSISTANCE FOLLOWING CONTINUED ATTACKS ON COMMERCIAL VESSELS

A joint maritime industry open letter was sent to United Nations secretary general Antonio Guterres calling for assistance and increased protection for the safe transit of ships in warlike and high-risk areas, following the recent seizure of the MSC ARIES. 16 industry associations including the ITF – highlighted the 'intolerable situation' where shipping has become a target. The ARIES was seized by Iranian forces 50 nautical miles north-east of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates on April 13.

The letter noted, "This is unacceptable. We have seen a worrying increase in the attacks on shipping. Shipping is not a target with no victims. Innocent seafarers have been killed; seafarers are being held hostage. This would be unacceptable on land, and it is unacceptable at sea. The world would be

outraged if four airliners were seized and held hostage with innocent souls onboard. Regrettably, there does not seem to be the same response or concern for the four commercial vessels and their crews being held hostage. Seafarers kept the world fed and warm during the pandemic with vital medicine, food and fuel delivered, irrespective of politics. Seafarers and the maritime sector are neutral and must not be politicized. It is the moral duty to protect seafarers.”

The letter asks that all member states be formally reminded of their responsibilities under international law. “And we ask that all efforts possible are brought to bear to release the seafarers and protect the safe transit of ships.”

ITF’s HIGGINBOTTOM, MM&P’s CISZEWSKI HONORED BY SEAFARERS HOUSE

Katie Higginbottom, who heads up the ITF Seafarers Trust, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of mariners worldwide, was honored last week by the Seafarers International House (SIH) at a ceremony on New York City. Katie has led the Trust for the past six years following 13 years in ITF’s Maritime Operations and Seafarers’ Section. SIH presented her with the 2024 Outstanding Friend of Seafarers award, a well-deserved accolade. The SIH is a charitable organization that provides seafarers and travelers with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance and advocacy. Their annual “Setting the Course” event in New York City honors those who fight on behalf of the maritime community and is dedicated to the welfare of seafarers.

Tim Nolan, President & CEO of TOTE, also was tapped as a fellow recipient of the Friend of Seafarers award. Randi Ciszewski, MM&P Government Fleet Representative, who has spent her career tirelessly working on behalf of civilian mariners to improve their wages and conditions, was awarded “Special Recognition for Service to Seafarers.” Congratulations!

M.E.B.A. HQ ONLINE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY – SIGN UP NOW

The monthly town-hall style M.E.B.A. Headquarters informational meeting will be held online utilizing “Teams” - with no voting and no resolutions introduced - on Wednesday, May 8, at 1300 (Eastern Time). This is not an actual membership meeting, but it is an excellent opportunity for Members, Applicants and Retirees to discuss M.E.B.A. business, exchange information and learn more about the latest Union initiatives.

Members, applicants and retirees need to register in advance for this meeting to mebahq@mebaunion.org. Upon confirmation of your status, the Teams access link will be emailed to you shortly before the meeting.

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

Monday, May 6 – **Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

Tuesday, May 7 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230.**

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

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

Friday, May 10 – **Honolulu@1100**

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

