

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

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



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

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### **TTD JOINS CALL TO SECURE MSP AS PANDEMIC SLOWS SHIPPING**

Giving a louder voice to concerned U.S.-flag shipping interests, the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD) is calling on Congressional leaders to strengthen national security by safeguarding the Maritime Security Program from the effects of the pandemic. The M.E.B.A. is a founding member of the TTD which represents 32 unions in the maritime, aviation, rail, transit, trucking, highway, longshore, and related industries. The commercial trade slowdown coupled with fewer Government cargoes is hurting both domestic and international shipping and is prompting companies to lay-up ships and lay off workers.

Those participating in the Maritime Security Program aren't exempt from the effects of the pandemic, and as the virus continues taking its toll on waterborne trade, its impact could deprive the Government of militarily-useful vessels, weaken the nation's readiness and further drain the pool of qualified U.S.-citizen mariners who support our country in times of peace and war.

The TTD joined the call to Congress requesting emergency supplemental funding for MSP to be included in their next economic COVID-19 relief package. Last week Rep. Elaine Luria and USA Maritime each sent letters to Congressional Leadership with a similar request. USA Maritime is a coalition of maritime unions, associations and shipping companies – including the M.E.B.A. and American Maritime Congress – fighting for the U.S. Merchant Marine.

TTD also asks Congressional Leaders to amend cargo preference statutes to guarantee that all U.S. government-generated cargoes, not just military cargo & equipment, are shipped on U.S.-flag bottoms for the duration of the pandemic.

Specifically, the \$219 million in relief funds would be distributed as following:

- \$109.8 million for the period of April 1, 2020 to the end of the current fiscal year, for an emergency stipend of \$1.83 million per vessel;
- \$109 million for the period of October 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, for an emergency stipend of \$1.82 million per vessel

The TTD noted, “This emergency stipend will serve to close the increasing gap between operating costs and revenue during the crisis as cargo volumes drop, to ensure that the U.S.-flag fleet can be preserved.”

### **CONFERENCE CALLS, VIDEO MEETINGS KEEP BUSINESS MOVING**

M.E.B.A.’s political and legislative offices haven’t slowed down during this pandemic and have diversified and stepped up their number of meetings thanks to less travel time and modern day technology. M.E.B.A.’s past commitment to fortifying our Political Action Fund continues to enable face-to-face time with key and influential lawmakers – though that interface comes at the courtesy of video conferencing. M.E.B.A. takes part in daily check-ins with Members of Congress – both by video and phone conference calls - as we push for initiatives to strengthen the Maritime Security Program, improve U.S.-flag shipping and fight to safeguard the rights of our frontline workers and secure needed protections in these dangerous times. The Union continues networking with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to ensure that our issues are not forgotten as Congress begins to consider additional measures to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the country’s health and economy. The ease of scheduling, simplified logistics (and lack of dress code!) have led to a proliferation of virtual meetings.

In this way, M.E.B.A. has been taking part in weekly Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD) meetings with top labor leadership along with high-powered Members of Congress discussing the priorities of transportation workers.

The Union continues to take part in meetings with the AFL-CIO and other labor groups and recently conducted Trustees meetings by Zoom. In addition, M.E.B.A.’s monthly membership meetings rebooted this week after a hiatus in April and debuted its temporary online format. USA Maritime meetings, that often occurred at M.E.B.A. Headquarters several times a month, now have become almost a daily affair.

Though the old way of doing business has changed for the time being, business is still getting done, and for now, we’re making the best of a bad situation.

### **USNS COMFORT IS BACK IN NORFOLK**

The USNS COMFORT is back at its berth in Norfolk, VA after a high-profile, whirlwind 31 days in New York City assisting in the battle against COVID-19. The vessel reverts to “Ready 5” status that will allow it to respond quickly to another mission if called upon.

The Military Sealift Command hospital ship, which arrived in New York City March 30, was originally tasked with providing care to non-COVID patients, bringing the first patient aboard on April 1. It quickly became apparent that in order to be of help to the city, COMFORT needed to treat all patients, regardless of their COVID status. On April 6, the ship began accepting COVID-positive patients following a thorough assessment of the existing design of the ship. MSC civilian mariners physically separated the hospital from the rest of the ship by cordoning off doors and ladder wells on the main deck, reconfiguring the ship to admit and treat all patients.

All crewmembers onboard the COMFORT have reportedly been tested for the virus since the vessel departed New York’s Pier 90, and they are currently undergoing a 14-day restriction of movement.

## **COVID-19 CASES ON LEROY GRUMMAN**

Almost half of the almost 50-person crew currently on the USNS LEROY GRUMMAN, a Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler, have tested positive for COVID-19. The vessel has been drydocked at Boston Ship Repair undergoing various repairs including a main engine overhaul. More than 20 crewmembers have tested positive and others are awaiting results. The crew has been quarantined at a nearby location.

The MSC has employed a restrictive stay-on-ship policy for fleet-wide civilian mariners (CivMars) since March 21 to keep the spread of the virus at bay. However, according to an association grievance filed by the M.E.B.A. on behalf of MSC CivMars it represents, the "gangway-up" order does not apply to other MSC and Navy employees including contractors who are able to enjoy their liberty and board and disembark MSC vessels.

## **DOL LINK FOR GOVERNMENT WORKERS TO FILE COVID-19 CLAIMS**

Federal employees who contract COVID-19 in the course of their on-the-job duties are entitled to workers' compensation coverage pursuant to the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA). The Department of Labor has created new procedures to specifically address COVID-19 claims. You can find out more information and see how to file a claim at the following link: <https://www.dol.gov/owcp/dfec/InfoFECACoverageCoronavirus.htm>

## **UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO**

In addition to the weekly *Telex Times* and our website, the Union continues to keep members informed through communications to our Union halls and offices - as well as by mass emails sent to members, applicants and retirees. If you want to ensure that you are part of the contact list receiving future updates, you must have a valid email address on file with M.E.B.A. Headquarters. M.E.B.A. also has contacted members by text message for those who have accurate cell phone information on file with HQ.

You can update all your current info including mailing address using the address change form available on the M.E.B.A. website. It can be found at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org) under the "Members" tab or in the "Documents & Member Notices" section. Alternatively, you can send your updated information to Renee Bowman at HQ by mail, fax at (202) 638-5369, or e-mail at [membership@mebaunion.org](mailto:membership@mebaunion.org) Since the M.E.B.A. Plans office in Baltimore and Headquarters databases are NOT linked, you must also forward a signed change of address form to the Plans Office if you wish to update your information with them.

## **THE "BIG U" LOOKING TO PARTNER WITH MAJOR WATERFRONT CITY**

As part of its plan to repurpose one of the greatest ocean liners ever built and return it to glory, the Conservancy that hopes to revitalize the SS UNITED STATES is looking to attract a major U.S. city to bring the "Big U" to its waterfront as a centerpiece attraction.

The SS UNITED STATES is still holds the "Blue Riband" westbound trans-Atlantic speed record. M.E.B.A. officers filled both engine rooms of the great ship during the Big U's heyday in the 1950s and '60s. But several times, the vessel was weeks away from the scrapyard before a last second arrangement bought her additional time. The ship has been rusting away for decades at Pier 82 on the Delaware River in Philadelphia.

In 2018, the SS United States Conservancy entered into an agreement with prominent commercial real estate development firm RXR Realty, to begin exploring options for the great ship's revitalization. The Conservancy and RXR believe "America's Flagship" could be repurposed into a floating hotel that would include "a collection of unique hospitality and cultural spaces" including a museum.

In search of a permanent home for the SS UNITED STATES, the Conservancy and RXR are requesting expressions of interest from a number of major US waterfront cities with the intent of starting a conversation about how this unique project can be a major driver of economic activity through the creation of a new, contemporary centerpiece for their waterfronts. Those cities include Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Miami, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

The Conservancy has set up a survey to help them plan their future museum aboard the ship that will help illustrate the history of the "Big U" for generations to come. You are urged to take the quick and easy survey that can be accessed at the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/thebigU>

### **PAYMENT PORTAL FOR DUES, P.A.F., G&W**

The payment portal accessed from M.E.B.A.'s homepage ([www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)) allows members and applicants ease when making a dues or service charge payment and to assist the P.A.F. and Good & Welfare funds. Payments can be made by credit card, debit card or through a checking account. A recurring payment option is also available on the portal enabling automatic quarterly payments so members can "set it and forget it" and always stay current. You simply check the "Recurring Billing" box that appears at the top of the page when you're filling out your information to enable automatic quarterly payments. This feature is also available to support the Good & Welfare and the Political Action Fund on a monthly basis. P.A.F. is crucial for keeping U.S. shipping and the Union's interests viable in the halls of Congress.

### **JUNE MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

*(Yet to be Determined if Meetings will be Held Online or at Union Halls)*

Monday, June 8 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;

Tuesday, June 9 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;

Wednesday, June 10 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

Thursday, June 11 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

Monday, June 12 – 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). 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.*