

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"

Number 38 – September 17, 2026



In this issue – Research Vessel MOU//National Security Concerns over Jones Act Waiver//New CG Credentialing System is Operational//DNV Says LNG Fleet May Need to Double//Cyber Attacks on Commercial Vessels//MarAd Advisory on Continued Threats//

M.E.B.A. AGREEMENT WITH KEYSTONE FOR RESEARCH VESSEL WORK

The Union has finalized a Memorandum of Understanding with Keystone Ocean Services, Inc. to provide covered employment for M.E.B.A. Deck and Engine Officers to augment manning aboard U.S.-flag research vessels, excluding NOAA research vessels. The new three-year successor agreement builds upon a successful expiring five-year arrangement that governs wages, benefits, and terms and conditions of employment when Keystone is successful in acquiring this third-party work. Keystone currently has employment opportunities with the University of Hawaii (R/V KILO MOANA) and University of Washington (R/V RACHEL CARSON & the THOMAS G. THOMPSON).

The University of Hawaii, through its School of Ocean & Earth Science Technology, supports highly diverse and specialized scientific operations, ranging from localized regional surveys to heavy-weather, global deep-sea expeditions. The KILO MOANA supports long-range blue-water expeditions across the Pacific. Common missions include the recurring, decade-spanning Hawai'i Ocean Time-series (HOT) program to track climate change and ocean acidification, precision deep-sea floor mapping utilizing advanced multibeam echosounders, and high-tech biological and geological sampling.

The University of Washington, through its School of Oceanography, conducts regional operations within the Salish Sea and the nearshore coastal waters of Washington and British Columbia. Missions generally involve high-frequency day and multi-day trips centered around local fisheries research, Puget Sound water-quality testing, biomass collection via specialized sonars, and hands-on training cruises for university students. In addition, the newly retro-fitted THOMAS G. THOMPSON can venture anywhere from the polar regions to the deepest ocean trenches. The crew manages complex, heavy-load operations, including launching advanced autonomous underwater vehicles to study active submarine volcanoes, core deep-ocean sediments, and servicing high-tech power grids on the seafloor.

The workday is eight hours, seven days a week, with overtime paid for work exceeding eight hours per day, including for the Master and Chief Engineer. No additional premiums or penalty pay apply unless authorized. Assignments generally range from one to 90 calendar days. Officers are informed of the expected duration when hired. Members are dispatched to the positions through the Union halls.

M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac signed the MOU that remains in force through the end of September 2029. M.E.B.A. Gulf Coast V.P. Adam Smith worked out terms with Keystone assisted by

Headquarters Contracts Officer Mark Gallagher. The MOU was sent to the Union halls this week where it will be available for review by members in good standing.

NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS OVER CONTINUED JONES ACT WAIVER

The ongoing waiver of the Jones Act continues to allow a troubling national-security vulnerability by opening protected U.S. domestic commerce to foreign vessels - including a significant number with ties to China. As of September 8, the Maritime Administration reported 251 vessel movements under the broad waiver. At least 69 movements - 27.5% - involved vessels linked to China through ownership, management or construction. Some movements have reportedly involved vessels connected to COSCO, the Chinese state-owned shipping giant that U.S. officials have accused of collecting intelligence for Beijing using concealed equipment. Also troubling, the latest, more limited waiver, in effect since August 17th, has now generated at least 80 Vessel Availability Requests, with repeated requests, compressed notice, narrow delivery windows and other restrictive requirements raising concerns that some applicants may be structuring requests in ways that make American vessels appear unavailable.

A waiver supposedly intended to address a national-defense need should not be creating opportunities for Chinese-linked vessels to carry cargo between American ports. The concern goes beyond individual voyages. Every time a foreign vessel replaces an American vessel, it weakens the U.S.-flag fleet, reduces work for American mariners and diminishes the domestic maritime capacity that the nation depends upon in a crisis.

The waiver is also difficult to justify as a national-defense measure. An earlier analysis of MarAd data found that U.S.-flag vessels were available for 86.5 percent of qualifying voyages, while none of the 78 voyages examined during the initial waiver period involved military-grade fuels required by the Defense Department. And despite allowing foreign vessels into domestic trades for months, the waiver has not produced the promised relief at the pump. That raises an obvious question: Why sacrifice American maritime capacity and national security if the policy isn't accomplishing its stated purpose? The lessons of the past remain clear: national maritime capability cannot be rented after an emergency begins. The ships and American mariners needed for national defense must be maintained before the crisis arrives. The Jones Act exists in large part to ensure that capability. Rather than extending waivers that increasingly benefit foreign operators - including companies with ties to a strategic adversary - the United States should be strengthening American shipping, American shipyards and American mariners.

TELL YOUR SENATOR: COSPONSOR THE SHIPS FOR AMERICA ACT

Mariners and maritime supporters are encouraged to take a moment to urge their senators to support the SHIPS for America Act and its inclusion in the Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act. The Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security (SHIPS) for America Act aims to address critical shortfalls in our nation's maritime and shipbuilding sectors that have been neglected for too long.

The Navy League's "Rapid Response campaign" makes it easy to learn more about the legislation and send a message directly to your senator. Click this link to support strengthening America's maritime capabilities: [Take Action: Support the SHIPS for America Act](#)

NEW COAST GUARD MARINER CREDENTIALING SYSTEM IS UP AND RUNNING

The Coast Guard's new Navita digital mariner credentialing system is now up and running, following its September 14 launch. Developed to modernize the credentialing process, Navita provides mariners with guided application workflows designed to help identify requirements, submit documentation and avoid incomplete applications.

Mariners are strongly encouraged to submit applications through Navita for electronic, first-in, first-out processing. The Coast Guard plans to phase out paper applications within the next year. The former ASAP portal has been discontinued, and inquiries to the National Maritime Center are now submitted through Navita's Case function. The Coast Guard cautions that Navita's launch will not immediately reduce existing processing times. Mariners should continue submitting applications well in advance of credential expirations to avoid potential disruptions.

DNV: LNG BUNKER FLEET MAY NEED TO DOUBLE BY 2030

The global fleet of LNG bunker vessels may need to more than double by 2030 as demand for LNG-fueled ships continues to outpace the growth of bunkering infrastructure, according to a new white paper from DNV. DNV estimates that between 165 and 208 LNG bunker vessels could be needed worldwide by the end of the decade. Without increased investment in bunker vessels, port infrastructure and fuel-transfer systems, limited fuel availability could become a constraint on the continued growth of LNG-fueled shipping.

The report, *Gas bunker vessels: facilitating the transition to alternative fuels*, examines the evolving role of bunker vessels, including vessel design and conversion opportunities, regulatory requirements, ship-to-ship transfer operations, safety management and crew competence. DNV also identifies opportunities to accelerate fleet growth by converting suitable small-scale LNG carriers into bunker vessels. While LNG is currently the leading gaseous marine fuel, DNV says the infrastructure, operational experience and safety practices being developed today could help support future fuels, including ammonia, liquefied biomethane and synthetic methane.

CYBER ATTACKS ON COMMERCIAL VESSELS

U.S. authorities are investigating suspected cyberattacks targeting commercial vessels after the Coast Guard and FBI boarded two foreign-flagged ships in the Gulf of Mexico last month. On Aug. 21, the Coast Guard boarded the oil tanker VL PROSPERITY, which was bound for Galveston, TX, after indications that its network had been compromised. The vessel reportedly experienced a 30-hour communications disruption while transiting the Strait of Gibraltar. An LNG carrier was also inspected three days later over a potential cyberattack. In April, the Maritime Administration issued an advisory urging shipowners and operators to strengthen cybersecurity practices and restrict access to vulnerable digital systems. The Coast Guard said the VL PROSPERITY was cleared for normal operations and that there were no reports of danger to the crew, vessel instability, environmental impact or operational disruption.

U.S. government agencies are reportedly tracking cyberthreats involving nearly 20 commercial vessels worldwide, with the Coast Guard asking for advance notice if any of the ships plan to enter a U.S. port. The Coast Guard, FBI and Department of Homeland Security are monitoring the vessels as concerns grow over cyberattacks against increasingly digitized maritime operations.

NEW MARAD ADVISORY ON CONTINUED THREATS TO COMMERCIAL SHIPPING

The Maritime Administration has issued a new advisory warning that the threat of Iranian attacks against commercial vessels remains high in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman. The advisory cites the continued threat of missile, armed drone and unmanned surface vessel attacks, along with the potential for Iranian forces to board or attempt to divert commercial ships. U.S.-flagged vessels are advised to remain as far from Iran as safely possible, maintain at least 30 nautical miles from U.S. military vessels, coordinate voyage planning with U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, and respond to coalition naval communications. MARAD also warns vessels to ignore unauthorized Iranian instructions to alter course or provide voyage information. The advisory further cautions mariners about significant GPS/GNSS interference and recommends increased reliance on traditional navigation methods. U.S.-flagged vessels are urged to conduct pre-voyage risk assessments, maintain heightened security measures and immediately report attacks or suspicious activity. The advisory is scheduled to remain in effect through March 8, 2027.

Earlier this week, Iranian forces reportedly attacked a U.S.-contracted vessel near the Strait of Hormuz, using four drones and at least one missile. One projectile allegedly struck the vessel, causing minor injuries and prompting medical treatment for those affected. Unspecified U.S. personnel were among those aboard and, at press time, the vessel had not been publicly identified. The incident comes as Iranian forces have also targeted U.S. unmanned maritime assets in the region, underscoring the continuing risks to American personnel and commercial shipping operating near the Strait of Hormuz.

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

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

Tuesday, October 6 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230; Portland, Maine@1200.**

Wednesday, October 7 – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing mebahq@mebaunion.org**

Thursday, October 8 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

Friday, October 9 – **Honolulu@1100**

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



***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