
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

DECEMBER 2021



House Passes Social Spending Package Nearing \$1.2 Trillion, Includes Funding for Heavy Icebreaking Vessel

On November 19th, the House of Representatives passed a \$1.7 trillion spending package also known as the Build Back Better Act, a massive piece of legislation that reflects numerous political priorities for the Biden Administration. The bill is aimed toward providing major federal investments across the board including climate programs, drug pricing reform, paid parental leave, while also raising taxes on corporations and wealthy individuals, among a multitude of provisions. M.E.B.A. members should note that the legislation also includes one major investment for the U.S. maritime industry: \$350 million dollars for the construction of a new U.S. Coast Guard heavy icebreaking ship to serve the Great Lakes, at least as capable as the Coast Guard Cutter *Mackinaw* (WLBB-30). Based on an economic study by the Lake Carriers Association, which includes the M.E.B.A.-contracted Interlake Steamship Company, shipping delays caused by ice cost the Great Lakes economy \$2 billion and more than 10,000 jobs over the past 7 years. The Build Back Better Act passed the House by a 220-213 on a near party line vote with only one Democrat voting 'no'. It heads to the Senate where it is being considered under the budget reconciliation process that allows passage of the legislation under a simple majority vote in the upper legislative chamber.

Maritime Labor-Backed FMC Nominee Advances Through Senate Committee

On November 17, the nomination of Max Vekich, to serve as a Commissioner of the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) by President Biden, advanced the Senate Commerce Committee. The FMC, which is an independent federal agency responsible for regulating the U.S. international ocean transportation system, has been in the spotlight in recent months due to its role in helping address supply chain issues such as cargo delays and congestion at U.S. ports. Vekich, a longtime member of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and former member of the Washington State Legislature, received a favorable vote by 15-13 from the Senate Commerce Committee, mostly along party lines. His nomination must clear a full Senate vote on the floor, at a date yet to be determined.
