

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

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



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

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In this issue//Re-Authorization of MSP Poised for Passage//Short Sea Shipping Bill Introduced//MAERSK COLUMBUS Assists Search & Rescue Efforts in Med//AFL-CIO Hails NAFTA Successor Agreement//LCA Airs Concerns about Icebreaking Capabilities//Extended Hours Continue at JAX Hall//USNS SALVOR Rescues Beached Passenger Vessel//Solidarity Nets New T.A.s Following Strikes//IMO Commits to Further Action on Gender Equality//Apply for Vacation & Port-Relief Benefits//Union Plus Store//

### **HOUSE/SENATE SET TO ADDRESS DEFENSE BILL THAT BODES WELL FOR MSP**

A 10-year re-authorization of the Maritime Security Program further extending the MSP until Fiscal Year 2035 is part of the final National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Conference Report that was passed by the House yesterday. It is expected to receive Senate consideration next week. The Report was agreed upon by negotiators that reconciled the different versions of the NDAA previously passed by the House and Senate. The Conference Report also contains a fix for an MSP funding shortfall that would have occurred in FY '22.

Though it appears the existence of the Program has been locked up for the foreseeable future, funding for the MSP is subject to annual appropriations, necessitating Congress to appropriate the funds year after year to ensure its continued operation.

The House version had included a provision – not mirrored in the Senate version – to create a 10-ship U.S.-flag commercial petroleum tanker vessel fleet that would operate similarly to the MSP. That provision did not make it to the Conference Report. However, conferees agreed to require that the issue be studied and directed that a report be submitted to Congress “on the capabilities of the U.S. to maintain adequate U.S. flag fuel tanker vessel capacity to support the full range of anticipated military operations” from 2020 – 2030. The report would describe and assess 1) current and projected U.S.-flagged fuel tanker vessel capacity, 2) current and projected U.S. military needs for U.S. military operations during most stressing peacetime and wartime 3) the number of foreign-flagged tanker vessels required to address U.S. military needs during peace and wartime, and 4) any gaps of our current capacity including the risk to military objections due to reliance on foreign- flagged tanker vessels.

### **SHORT SEA SHIPPING BILL INTRODUCED**

Reps. Brian Higgins (D-NY) and Mike Kelly (R-PA) have introduced legislation to exempt from the Harbor Maintenance Tax (HMT) non-bulk commercial cargo that is loaded at a U.S. port and transported and unloaded to another U.S. port or Canadian port in the Great Lakes region, by coastal or river route. The bill, H.R. 5351, has been dubbed “The Short Sea Shipping Act of 2019.”

The legislation would incentivize shippers to move cargo via maritime transportation (i.e. short sea shipping).

## **MAERSK COLUMBUS ASSISTS SMALL BOAT MAKING MED CROSSING**

The crew of the MAERSK COLUMBUS mobilized and carried out a successful search for a boat in distress that was making a Mediterranean crossing from Algeria to Spain. A distress call had been relayed to the COLUMBUS, a container ship crewed by M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU mariners. After posting extra lookouts and manning the bridge wing search lights, crewmembers spotted a small black rubber boat off in the distance with 11 persons onboard who had “lost their way,” including a small child and an infant. Rough weather delayed a rescue. But the COLUMBUS stayed on scene, ensured the continued safety of the Algerian group and coordinated with authorities until a Spanish patrol boat could effect a rescue. Capt. John Finney directed the effort and the operation was further aided by Chief Mate Marwan Elsamny who is fluent in Arabic and was able to communicate with the migrants. A photo of the crew was posted on M.E.B.A.’s Facebook site.

M.E.B.A. members assisting the operation onboard the COLUMBUS included C/E Jon Schmidt, 1<sup>st</sup> A/E Frank Whelpley, 2<sup>nd</sup> A/E Julianne Cona and 3<sup>rd</sup> A/E Seth Kaye.

## **AFL-CIO SUPPORTING NAFTA REPLACEMENT FOLLOWING TRADE DEAL CHANGES**

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka issued the Federation’s support of a newly tweaked trade deal that would replace the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an over-25 year old pact frequently criticized by U.S. labor unions. This renegotiated U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) finally gained union support over an earlier version that lacked adequate labor and environmental standards. Trumka also pointed out the current version drops language providing giveaways to pharmaceutical companies that were part of the 2017 proposal that also contained “loopholes designed to make it harder to prosecute labor violations.”

Trumka said the new deal “is far from perfect,” but it makes trade rules “fairer” in a new package that will be more enforceable — also allowing a process that provides “for the inspections of factories and facilities that are not living up to their obligations.”

A White House statement called the new USMCA the “biggest and best trade agreement in the history of the world.” Congress will next choose whether to ratify the new USMCA as the AFL-CIO’s endorsement will help persuade progressive Democrats to support the agreement while several Republicans expressed dismay that the President made too many giveaways to Democrats in order to secure a key campaign pledge. However, so far only one Senator has vowed to vote against the agreement (Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA)).

While the House has indicated it will vote on the trade agreement next week before Congress adjourns for the Christmas break, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell threw cold water on that plan calling the new trade pact “not as good as I’d hoped.” He declared that the trade agreement would not be considered by the Senate until after the conclusion of expected impeachment proceedings.

Trumka noted that the USMCA alone “is not a solution for outsourcing, inequality or climate change. Successfully tackling these issues requires a full-court press of economic policies that empower workers, including the repeal of tax cuts which reward companies for shipping our jobs overseas.”

“Make no mistake,” he said. “We demanded a trade deal that benefits workers and fought every single day to negotiate that deal; and now we have secured an agreement that working people can proudly support.”

### **LAKE CARRIERS AIR CONCERNS ABOUT ICEBREAKING CAPABILITIES**

With temperatures falling on the Great Lakes and significant ice forming, the Lake Carriers Association (LCA) says the U.S. economy is facing potential job losses and serious financial implications as icebreaking assets are exposed.

“The nation’s economy depends on reliable and predictable icebreaking on the Great Lakes,” said LCA President Jim Weakley. “Last year, when cargoes carried on U.S. Great Lakes ships were delayed or cancelled because of inadequate icebreaking, 5,000 jobs were lost and the economy took a \$1 billion hit,” he said. LCA, represents 13 companies that operate vessels on the Great Lakes including M.E.B.A.-contracted Interlake Steamship Company.

LCA said the outlook is not good for reliable icebreaking on the Lakes. The number of U.S. and Canadian Coast Guard icebreakers today is just 60 percent of what they were in the 1980s and 1990s for a system that has more shoreline than the entire U.S. east coast. The U.S. Coast Guard has only 11 icebreakers in service, down from 19. During the ice season, as many as five have been sidelined with engine failures and other age-related problems. The Canadian Coast Guard has only two icebreakers, down from seven. Six of the U.S. Great Lakes icebreakers are 40 years-old and the Canadian’s two icebreakers are 50 and 35 years-old. LCA says this lack of adequate icebreaking on the Lakes continues to have far-reaching national implications. Jobs across the country are being lost as Great Lakes shipping companies struggle to move the vital building blocks of America during the ice season.

“We continue to voice our concerns that both the U.S. and Canadian Coast Guards need to take this seriously and put more icebreaking resources in the Great Lakes and repower the current aging assets to ensure they can continue to break ice,” Weakley said. “However, the response has been slow as molasses in winter and insufficient for the decrepit fleet of icebreakers. We are at a critical juncture, just to keep the small number of icebreaking ships operating is an ongoing challenge.”

### **EXTENDED HOURS CONTINUE AT JAX HALL**

M.E.B.A.’s Jacksonville hall continues to keep their doors open a little longer on a daily basis following the expiration of a successful trial period. Following member input, M.E.B.A.’s District Executive Committee had extended the operating hours at the hall for a two month trial which expired at the end of November. The DEC will wait a little longer before deciding if the change is justified on a permanent basis. Since October 1, the hall added two more hours to its daily operation remaining open between 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

### **USNS SALVOR RESCUES BEACHED PASSENGER VESSEL**

Civilian mariners and U.S. Navy divers aboard the Military Sealift Command salvage ship USNS SALVOR rendered assistance to a Micronesian passenger ship that ran aground off the coast of Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia, during a storm on December 1.

The SALVOR was in Chuuk’s Weno Harbor conducting salvage training, but got underway in response to distress calls from the SS THORFINN, a charter vessel that had run aground on a reef in Chuuk Lagoon. After ensuring the safety of THORFINN’s crew, divers from the U.S. Navy’s Mobile

Diving and Salvage Unit One (MDSU-1) worked with SALVOR's civilian mariners to free the distressed vessel and guide them to safe anchorage.

"It was a great example of what we can accomplish when we work together as a team," said Capt. Robert Williams, commodore of Military Sealift Command Far East. "Our civilian mariners and Navy divers were ready to respond when needed and worked seamlessly together to safely and professionally execute the rescue."

SALVOR regularly conducts salvage, diving, towing, offshore firefighting, heavy-lift operations and theater security cooperation missions. It is one of only two rescue and salvage vessels in the MSC inventory and the only ship of its kind in the Far East.

### **SOLIDARITY NETS NEW TENTATIVE AGREEMENTS FOLLOWING STRIKES**

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) recently won two important strikes. ATU members working for private contractor Transdev (which manages portions of the Washington, D.C., area public transit system) ended their strike this last weekend after the two sides reached a tentative agreement and bus routes returned to normal on Monday.

ATU members working on the Fairfax Connector, led by International President John Costa, went on strike Dec. 4, protesting unfair labor practices, bad faith negotiations and privatization of bus service. Of the victory, Costa said, "Our strike was a victory, sending a loud and clear message to Transdev that we won't tolerate their unlawful tactics at the bargaining table. We do reserve the right to walk off the job again if the good faith bargaining by Transdev disappears."

A second strike, which had been going on since Oct. 24 at the Cinder Bed Road garage, ended earlier this week as ATU and Transdev reached a tentative agreement. Both agreements must still be approved by ATU members.

### **IMO COMMITS TO FURTHER ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY**

The International Maritime Organization's World Maritime theme "Empowering Women in the Maritime Community" helped raise awareness of the importance of gender equality and highlight the important - yet under-utilized - contribution of women within the maritime sector. The IMO Assembly recently adopted a resolution on "Preserving the Legacy of the World Maritime Theme for 2019 and achieving a Barrier-Free Working Environment for Women in the Maritime Sector."

The resolution urges governments, maritime administrations and the industry to endeavor to reach a barrier-free environment for women, so that all women can participate fully, safely and without hindrance in the activities of the maritime community, including seafaring and shipbuilding activities. The resolution cites testimony from women from across the various maritime industries which demonstrates that barriers and obstacles still exist at every level. IMO says the work towards gender equality, including the fostering of a safe environment for women in the maritime sector, remains incomplete and should continue to be pursued.

### **AVOID THE YEAR-END RUSH – APPLY FOR VACATION & PORT RELIEF BENEFITS**

The deadline for issuing checks dated in 2019 in the Outports *and* the Plan Office is Tuesday, December 17, 2019. The final Direct Deposit Transfer for 2019 will be made on 12/18/2019 and

the funds will be deposited into your bank account on 12/20/2019. Any requests for Port Relief and Vacation checks received after 12/17/19 at 12:00 PM EST will be paid on 1/21/2020.

Any member who requires that his/her check be dated in 2019 must file before this deadline. Remember, Wednesday December 25, 2019 and Wednesday January 1, 2020 are holidays and the Outports and the Plan Office will be closed. It is always wise to plan ahead, so you should verify the specific holiday schedule with the Plan Office Representative.

#### *Split Your Vacation Payments between 2019 and 2020*

You can submit an Application for Vacation Pay prior to the end of the year and request that the payment of your vacation benefits be split. Two checks will be issued to you, one in 2019 and a second in 2020. The 12/17/2019 deadline applies to split claims also. The vacation benefits paid in this manner **MUST** be a continuous vacation period. Please contact the Vacation Plan staff in Baltimore at (800) 811-6322 or (410) 547-9111 if you have any questions.

#### **UNION PLUS STORE**

The Union Plus online store ([www.shopunionplus.org](http://www.shopunionplus.org)) holiday sale continues until December 31<sup>st</sup>. The 100% union-made apparel and gear provide great holiday gift options. For a limited time, you can enjoy a 20% discount on t-shirts, hats, sweatshirts, coolers and more using promo code LP2019. This promotion may not be combined with other offers. The sale ends on 12/31/2019.

The non-profit Union Plus is a consumer benefits organization created and endorsed by the AFL-CIO. Union Plus programs, which are available to M.E.B.A. members, retirees and our affiliates, provide a vast range of money-saving benefits and services. The M.E.B.A. is enrolled in dozens of moneysaving U.P. programs ranging from life insurance to auto services discounts.

#### **REGULAR MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

Monday, January 6 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;  
Tuesday, January 7 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;  
Wednesday, January 8 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;  
Thursday, January 9 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;  
Friday, January 10 – Honolulu@1100.

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



*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.*