

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"
M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES
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TRI-PARTITE UNIONS AGREEMENT FOR MARAD RRF FLEET OFFICERS

The 2016 Maritime Administration Ship Manager contracts for the Ready Reserve Force (RRF) fleet came to a close on July 26, 2024, when MarAd transitioned to a new bridge contract effective July 27, 2024. The Tri-Partite unions (M.E.B.A., AMO & MM&P) negotiated a new Memorandum, dated July 25, 2024, to cover ship officer employment during the MarAd bridge contract and thereafter. Many thanks to M.E.B.A. Gulf Coast V.P. Adam Smith, as well as the Union's Contracts Officer at Headquarters, who did tireless work to secure this hard-fought agreement on behalf of our members sailing in the fleet.

M.E.B.A. is pleased to announce that Keystone Shipping Services, Inc., recognizing their employees' tireless efforts in operating and maintaining these aging government assets, has signed the Agreement, as has every other non-M.E.B.A. Ship Manager or General Agent (GA) contracted with MarAd.

Unfortunately, ASM/Patriot did not recognize or appreciate their employees' efforts in this regard as ASM/Patriot remains the lone hold-out in signing the MarAd RRF MOUs negotiated specifically by the Tri-Partite unions for this government work. ASM/Patriot employees continue to be covered under the commercial contracts and M.E.B.A. asks for their patience as we work to bring this unfortunate situation to a close.

M.E.B.A. EVP TAKES PART IN KP BOV MEET

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) hosted its first in-person Board of Visitors (BOV) meeting since Vice Admiral Joanna M. Nunan took over as Superintendent. Senator Mark Kelly, Class of 1986 alumnus, former Naval Officer and Astronaut, took on the role of Board Chairman.

M.E.B.A.'s Executive Vice President Claudia Cimini took part in the meeting with other BOV members including Senator Roger Wicker, and Maritime Administrator Rear Admiral Ann Phillips, among others. This gathering underscored the collective effort to shape the future of the USMMA.

Academy leaders provided the Board with comprehensive updates on several key areas, including institutional culture, educational programs, facilities and infrastructure, athletic programs, sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response, admission trends and governance.

The Board of Visitors serves an essential advisory function, offering guidance to key figures such as the President of the United States, the Secretary of Transportation and members of Congress.

ILLINOIS PROTECTS WORKERS FROM UNION CAPTIVE AUDIENCE MEETINGS

Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed a bill into law on Wednesday that shields workers from employer political and religious speech including anti-union captive audience meetings. Illinois is now the 8th state to pass a law protecting workers from such employer anti-union messaging tactics.

The Worker Freedom of Speech Act is designed to prohibit employers from threatening, disciplining, firing, or otherwise retaliating against workers who refuse to attend mandatory workplace meetings focused on communicating opinions on political or religious matters. It will not prevent employers from holding meetings, only protect workers who choose not to engage in matters unrelated to their work.

Taking effect on January 1, the new law also creates a right of action for individual workers to sue employers if they are punished for refusing to attend these meetings.

“Captive Audience Meetings are a direct violation of Workers’ Rights,” said Illinois AFL-CIO President Tim Drea. “They force our most vulnerable employees to choose between their job and personal values. Employers are increasingly using the workplace to advance their political and religious interests, and this creates an atmosphere ripe for coercion. The Worker Freedom of Speech Act ensures that workers are protected when choose to walk away from these meetings.”

FMC RULE ON CARRIER CARGO SPACE REFUSALS

Last week, the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) issued a final ruling outlining a new framework to assess when carriers decline to accommodate cargo space requests. This regulation is an outcropping from the Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 2022 (OSRA). Before OSRA’s enactment, numerous shippers had lodged complaints with the FMC, alleging that carriers were denying them vessel space. During the pandemic, agricultural exporters particularly faced challenges, as carriers often prioritized shipping empty containers back to Asia to meet the surging demand for foreign goods.

The final rule clarifies criteria for determining when a carrier’s actions constitute a violation. It differentiates between alleged refusals occurring during the “negotiation” phase and those during the “execution” phase of a transaction. FMC Chairman Daniel Maffei emphasized that ocean carriers must engage in negotiations and cannot reject shippers without valid reasons. The final rule, published in the *Federal Register*, outlines examples of unreasonable conduct, such as insufficient notice of scheduling changes and unreliable vessel information.

This new regulation will take effect on September 23, though two sections regarding the requirement for ocean carriers to file documented export policies are still under review. These policies must detail pricing strategies, services offered, equipment provision strategies, and descriptions of markets served.

While the final rule provides guidelines, each complaint from shippers will be assessed individually, and not all refusals will necessarily be deemed violations. The FMC stated that if an ocean common carrier can demonstrate a reasonable basis for refusing to negotiate or transport cargo, their actions may not be considered unlawful. The rule includes non-binding and non-exhaustive examples of unreasonable behavior that the Commission may use in evaluating such allegations.

TRANSPORTATION SPENDING BILL BOOSTS MARAD FUNDING

The Maritime Administration will enjoy a slight funding bump if a recently-passed Transportation bill to be considered on the Senate Floor meets ultimate passage. The Transportation-Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations bill provides \$98.737 billion in overall discretionary spending for the Departments of Transportation and Housing budgets including full funding for the Maritime Security Program (\$318 million) and Tanker Security Program (\$120 million) fleets. The THUD bill also bolsters MarAd's Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) with \$200 million for FY 2025 Program (in addition to \$450 million made available from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law).

Overall, the bill provides \$1.14 billion for the Maritime Administration, \$202 million above FY 2024. This also includes: \$10 million for the Cable Security Fleet; \$191 million for the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, \$178.4 million for State Maritime Academies, of which \$132.7 million is for the National Security Multi-Mission Vessel Program, and \$20 million for the Small Shipyard Grant Program to modernize domestic commercial ship construction capacity.

When lawmakers return to Washington in September, they'll have just a handful of legislative days to figure out how to avert a government shutdown at the end of the month. Both chambers are likely headed toward passing a stopgap running through mid-December, potentially with a disaster relief supplemental spending package attached.

SPACE AVAILABLE FOR TWO CMES COURSES IN AUGUST

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School announced that it has additional roster space available in the August 19-30 installment of its Machine Shop Proficiency course.

In addition, the School has an opening in its Marine Electric Propulsion/High Voltage Safety course scheduled for August 19-30.

Applications can be sent via the CMES website (www.mebaschool.org), by fax (410) 822-7220, or by email to applications@mebaschool.org

PANAMA CANAL CONTINUES TO ALLOW MORE TRAFFIC

The Panama Canal plans to raise the daily transit slots for ships to 36, up from the current 34, starting in September. This adjustment comes as increased rainfall allows the easing of restrictions imposed during a recent drought, according to the Canal's deputy administrator.

The year 2023 marked the third driest on record for Panama, significantly reducing the Canal's water levels and prompting authorities to limit vessel traffic through this crucial route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. At times, the backlog grew to over 100 ships, with some waiting up to 21 days for passage. The canal handles roughly 5% of the world's shipping traffic.

SMALL UPTICK IN GLOBAL MARINER “HAPPINESS” IN LATEST REPORT

The latest Seafarers Happiness Index report by the Mission to Seafarers presents a complex yet increasingly positive outlook on the well-being of global seafarers. The happiness index rose slightly to 6.99 in the second quarter of 2024, up from 6.94 in Q1. Despite this improvement, the survey reveals concerns about a growing divide among seafarers’ experiences at sea. A ‘digital divide’ has emerged, highlighting disparities in access to modern communications and connectivity, as well as varying levels of training and readiness for new fuels and technologies, depending on the type of vessel.

Feedback from the Q2 report indicates that the positive trend in seafarer well-being can be attributed to enhancements in several key areas, such as shore leave, wages, training, crew interaction, and workload. While the uptick in happiness is encouraging, the situation is more nuanced than it initially appears. According to survey results, the type of vessel plays a significant role in shaping seafarers’ experiences, with those on tankers feeling well-prepared and qualified to handle the challenges of new fuels. In contrast, crew members on dry cargo and container vessels reported feeling excluded from vital technological advancements in the industry.

Seafarers on ships equipped with modern communications technology note the transformative impact it has on their social and emotional well-being, as staying connected with loved ones is crucial for morale. However, those without access to these technologies face difficulties, dealing with limited data, slow connections, or no connectivity at all.

Shore leave, an essential factor for maintaining mental and physical health, is often restricted by tight port schedules, regulatory issues, and inconsistent practices across different ports and companies. Access to recreational facilities like gyms is also critical, but the quality and safety of equipment often leave much to be desired. Additionally, cost-cutting measures can result in monotonous meals, negatively affecting crew morale.

NLRB ISSUES FAIR CHOICE–EMPLOYEE VOICE FINAL RULE

The National Labor Relations Board issued its Fair Choice–Employee Voice Final Rule, restoring three key policies that provide workers with a fair opportunity to decide whether they want union representation in the workplace and a process that respects workers’ choices. These include the blocking charge policy, voluntary recognition of a union, and construction industry bargaining relationships. The Final Rule returns to the Board’s pre-2020 practice on blocking charges before an election, restoring a Regional Director’s authority to delay an election if unfair labor practice conduct is sufficiently serious to interfere with employee free choice. The rule reverses the Board’s 2020 rule requiring Regional Directors to run elections in an election environment tainted by unfair labor practices. The rule supports workers’ and employers’ ability to establish a bargaining relationship through voluntary recognition. It removes the 2020 rule’s requirement that when an employer chooses to voluntarily recognize a union that represents a majority of its workers, the parties provide for a mandatory 45-day period to allow the opportunity for a minority of workers to demand an election questioning that choice. The rule also restores the Board’s 56-year-old voluntary recognition bar, respecting the bargaining relationship that the parties have voluntarily chosen.

Finally, the Fair Choice–Employee Voice rule grants parity between unions in the construction industry and other unions. Because of the transitory nature of work in the construction industry,

construction-worker unions that are recognized under Section 8(f) of the National Labor Relations Act do not have the same protections as non-construction unions. The new rules allow construction-worker unions to more readily establish the same protections as other unions, providing a more stable foundation for collective bargaining.

UNIONS POWER AMERICA SWEEPSTAKES – ENTER NOW!

Union members can also enter the “Unions Power America” Sweepstakes for a chance to win various prizes and can earn bonus entries by completing additional activities with Union Plus. The Sweepstakes began Wednesday, July 31 and runs until August 21. The Grand Prize is \$50,000 and a four-night stay at Casa de Campo Resort & Villas in the Dominican Republic. Two First Prize winners will receive \$5,000 each and 30 people will receive \$1,000 each. Winners will be announced on Labor Day, September 2nd in which there will be additional live event prizes handed out. You can enter at unionplus.org/laborday

Union Plus programs, which are available to M.E.B.A. members, applicants, 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.

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

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

Tuesday, August 6 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230.**

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

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

Friday, August 9 – **Honolulu@1100**

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***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. 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 Calhoon 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