

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 51 – December 19, 2024



In this issue – Landmark SHIPS for America Act Introduced//M.E.B.A. Scores Huge Win for CivMars on Two MSC LMSRs//Partial Government Shutdown Looming//Trump Backs ILA on Automation//CG Rule on Streamlining Credentialing Process//Delivery of MSC's USNS RFK//Labor 411 Gift Guide//M.E.B.A. Calendars at Halls//Holiday Schedule//

M.E.B.A. ENDORSES HISTORIC LEGISLATION TO REVITALIZE U.S.-FLAG SHIPPING AND AMERICAN SHIPBUILDING

Landmark legislation, supported by the M.E.B.A. and the maritime industry at large that aims to revitalize U.S.-flag shipping and American shipbuilding has been introduced by a bi-partisan collection of lawmakers. The Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security (SHIPS) for America Act, is intended to restore American leadership across the oceans by establishing national oversight and consistent funding for U.S. maritime policy, incentivizing domestic shipbuilding, enabling U.S.-flagged vessels to better compete in international commerce, rebuilding the U.S. shipyard industrial base, and expanding the mariner and shipyard workforce.

The SHIPS for America Act is being headlined by Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Todd Young (R-IN) as well as Congressmen John Garamendi (D-CA-8), and Trent Kelly (R-MS-1). While the legislation is being introduced at the end of this current congressional session in both the House and Senate, it is expected to be re-introduced next year when it will await further deliberation.

The lawmakers said that because of China's growing influence in the global maritime sector, strengthening the U.S. Merchant Marine is essential for maintaining U.S. dominance in international commerce. They noted, "In times of conflict, the U.S. Merchant Marine will be vital for transporting goods and military cargo, while in peacetime, it will fortify supply chains and ensure economic resilience. The introduction of this bill represents a strategic effort to rebuild the U.S. maritime industry, securing both national security and global competitiveness."

M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac signaled the Union's endorsement of this historic legislation while noting, "A resilient maritime industry is the backbone of a strong nation. We are proud to endorse the SHIPS for America Act, which represents one of the most significant investments in the U.S. merchant marine in decades and aims to address critical shortfalls in our nation's maritime and shipbuilding sectors that have long been neglected."

He continued, pointing out that the legislative package emphasizes U.S.-flag shipping and shipbuilding as essential elements of our national security strategy. "This comprehensive legislation will revitalize our Merchant Marine through strategic investments, while also positioning the United

States to compete economically against China and other foreign flag-of-convenience adversaries that have exploited an uneven playing field through the use of cheap labor and regulatory loopholes. Most significantly, America must maintain its independent ability to import and export cargo, if it is to remain free of foreign coercion in international trade.”

An overwhelming amount of major maritime entities (including port, shipbuilding, unions, shipping companies, maritime academies, etc.) joined in with their approval of the legislation. American Maritime Congress President Fair Kim expressed his enthusiastic support for the legislation calling it a “cornerstone of our nation’s future national and economic security.” He said, “For nearly half a century, AMC has advocated and educated the American public and its political leadership on the critical role of the U.S. merchant marine—the SHIPS for America Act is a historic opportunity for our great nation to once again prosper while increasing national security.”

Among other things, the SHIPS for America Act would:

- Coordinate U.S. maritime policy by establishing the position of Maritime Security Advisor within the White House, who would lead an interagency Maritime Security Board tasked with making whole-of-government strategic decisions for how to implement a National Maritime Strategy. The bill also establishes a Maritime Security Trust Fund that would reinvest duties and fees paid by the maritime industry into maritime security programs and infrastructure supporting maritime commerce.
- Establish a national goal of expanding the U.S.-flag international fleet by 250 ships in 10 years by creating the Strategic Commercial Fleet Program, which would facilitate the development of a fleet of commercially operated, U.S.-flagged, American crewed, and domestically built merchant vessels that can operate competitively in international commerce.
- Enhance the competitiveness of U.S.-flagged vessels in international commerce by establishing a Rulemaking Committee on Commercial Maritime Regulations and Standards to cut through the U.S. Coast Guard’s bureaucracy and red tape that limits the international competitiveness of U.S.-flagged vessels, requiring that government-funded cargo move aboard U.S.-flag vessels, and requiring a portion of commercial goods imported from China to move aboard U.S.-flag vessels starting in 2029.
- Expand the U.S. shipyard industrial base, for both military and commercial oceangoing vessels, by establishing a 25 percent investment tax credit for shipyard investments, transforming the Title XI Federal Ship Financing Program into a revolving fund, and establishing a Shipbuilding Financial Incentives program to support innovative approaches to domestic ship building and ship repair.
- Accelerate U.S. leadership in next-generation ship design, manufacturing processes, and ship energy systems by establishing the U.S. Center for Maritime Innovation, which would create regional hubs across the country.
- Make historic investments in maritime workforce by establishing a Maritime and Shipbuilding Recruiting Campaign, allowing mariners to retain their credentials through a

newly established Merchant Marine Career Retention Program, investing in long-overdue infrastructure needs for the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, and supporting State Maritime Academies and Centers for Excellence for Domestic Maritime Workforce Training and Education. The bill also makes long-overdue changes to streamline and modernize the U.S. Coast Guard's Merchant Mariner Credentialing system.

M.E.B.A. VIGILANCE RESULTS IN HUGE WIN FOR PILILAAU & SEAY MARINERS

M.E.B.A. is pleased to announce that the 18-month fight to rectify the 10% wage and benefit disparity on the USNS SEAY and USNS PILILAAU is finally coming to a close. M.E.B.A. was notified today by Mr. John Santiago, Investigator for the U.S. Department of Labor, Wage & Hour Division, that the modified extension agreement entered into between the predecessor contractor U.S. Marine Management Inc. (USMMI) and its labor representative American Maritime Officers (AMO) with an effective date of April 1, 2023 applies to the contract awarded to ASM/Patriot Contracting Services, LLC, in August 2023, N3220523C4031 for the operation and maintenance of the above named vessels.

Military Sealift Command attempted to circumvent the Service Contract Act on 1965, as amended at Sections 2 (a) (1) and (2) and 4 (c) and DOL's implementing regulations by not incorporating the required revised Wage Determination reflecting the new April 1, 2023, and April 1, 2024, AMO labor rates into the SEAY/PILILAAU solicitation. When ASM/Patriot took over the operation of the two vessels in September of 2023, our members were paid wage and fringe benefits contained in the DOL Wage Determination that was based off the older October 1, 2022, labor agreement.

The Department of Labor will be in touch with ASM/Patriot to start the process of calculating back pay and benefits. However, this process may be further delayed if there is a government – wide shutdown until a new Continuing Resolution (CR) is passed that funds government operations.

M.E.B.A. leadership, including Contracts Officer Mark Gallagher, had remained vigilant on this issue since bringing it to the Department of Labor's attention over a year ago. Last month, M.E.B.A. President Adam Vokac dispatched a strongly worded letter to MSC Commander Admiral Philip Sobeck about MSC's blatant disregard of the Service Contract Act. President Vokac noted that the SCA violation against "service employees represented by M.E.B.A. and other labor unions on the two vessels is unacceptable and frankly un-American."

President Vokac told the Admiral that after Gallagher's attempts to rectify the matter with MSC were minimized, it became obvious that nothing would be done and the Union filed a complaint with the DOL in October 2023. He told the Admiral that "such an egregious breach of a federal statute cannot prevail, and M.E.B.A. must do everything in our power to protect and safeguard the prevailing rates and practices of the maritime industry. It is my responsibility to ensure I have mariners in good morale ready to meet any demands asked by our nation."

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN LOOMING AS BUDGET DEAL TORPEDOED

After pushback from key Republican figures late Wednesday including President-elect Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson withdrew a last-minute agreed-upon funding extension proposal that would have prevented a partial government shutdown after the deadline is reached at midnight on Friday.

The Continuing Resolution (CR), unveiled on Tuesday, would have extended government funding through March 14 but also included provisions for disaster relief, bipartisan health-care policy changes and a congressional pay raise. The disaster relief portion alone accounted for over \$100 billion of the bill's total cost. The CR had allocated emergency funds to help states and territories repair damage to roads and bridges in the National Highway System caused by natural disasters. It also fully funded the remaining costs for reconstructing the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, MD. With a Friday deadline looming, lawmakers must act to secure new funding.

PRESIDENT-ELECT BACKS ILA ON AUTOMATION

President-elect Donald Trump voiced strong support for the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) last in the union's ongoing contract negotiations with employer U.S. Maritime Alliance (USMX). The talks have been stalled over disagreements about automation, particularly regarding the implementation of semi-automated rail-mounted gantry cranes (RMGs). In a social media post, Trump expressed his solidarity with ILA on the issue:

“Just finished a meeting with the International Longshoremen's Association and its President, Harold Daggett, and Executive VP, Dennis Daggett. There has been a lot of discussion having to do with 'automation' on United States docks. I've studied automation, and know just about everything there is to know about it. The amount of money saved is nowhere near the distress, hurt, and harm it causes for American Workers, in this case, our Longshoremen. Foreign companies have made a fortune in the U.S. by giving them access to our markets. They shouldn't be looking for every last penny knowing how many families are hurt. They've got record profits, and I'd rather these foreign companies spend it on the great men and women on our docks, than machinery, which is expensive, and which will constantly have to be replaced. In the end, there's no gain for them, and I hope that they will understand how important an issue this is for me. For the great privilege of accessing our markets, these foreign companies should hire our incredible American Workers, instead of laying them off, and sending those profits back to foreign countries. It is time to put AMERICA FIRST!”

Soon after, USMX released a carefully worded statement as the sides attempt to come to terms on an overdue agreement: “We appreciate and value President-elect Trump's statement on the importance of American ports. It's clear President-elect Trump, USMX, and the ILA all share the goal of protecting and adding good-paying American jobs at our ports. But this contract goes beyond our ports – it is about supporting American consumers and giving American businesses access to the global marketplace – from farmers, to manufacturers, to small businesses, and innovative start-ups looking for new markets to sell their products. To achieve this, we need modern technology that is proven to improve worker safety, boost port efficiency, increase port capacity, and strengthen our supply chains. ILA members' compensation increases with the more goods they move – the greater capacity our ports have and goods that are moved means more money in their pockets. We look forward to working with the President elect and the incoming administration on how our members are working to support the strength and resilience of the U.S. supply chain and making crucial investments that support ILA members and millions of workers and businesses across the entire domestic supply chain, improving efficiency and creating even more high-paying jobs for ILA members.”

The clock is ticking for both sides, with the current master contract temporarily extended until January 16, 2025. If no agreement is reached by then, the next steps remain uncertain. Federal intervention may play a role in resolving the dispute.

COAST GUARD FINALIZES RULE STREAMLINING CREDENTIALING REQUIREMENTS

The Coast Guard has issued a final rule updating the accepted required payment method for mariner credentialing fees, removing the requirement for prospective mariners to take an oath before an authorized official, and changing the format requirements for certificates of discharge. The Coast Guard is working to replace the Merchant Mariner Licensing and Documentation database used by the National Maritime Center (NMC) to issue merchant mariner credentials (MMCs). The more technologically advanced, user-friendly system, called Coast Guard Navita, should reduce risk and improve customer service to mariners and the maritime industry. The final rule streamlines current credentialing requirements and supports the future implementation of Navita by allowing for modern information submission processes and payment procedures. For more information, the final rule is available on the Federal Register or by searching on www.regulations.gov under Docket Number USCG–2021–0834.

The NMC will provide additional information on the NMC website for the implementation of the requirement to pay merchant mariner credentialing fees using Pay.gov, the removal of the requirement for prospective mariners to take an oath before an authorized official while completing MMC applications (Form CG-719B), and the format changes for certificates of discharge. Check back on the NMC website for these updates. Specific questions on mariner applications or credentialing procedures may be directed to the NMC Customer Service Center, Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., at 1 (888) 427-5662, via e-mail to iasknmc@uscg.mil, or through the NMC Chat.

MSC TAKES DELIVERY OF NEWBUILD OILER - USNS RFK

The Military Sealift Command recently took delivery of the fleet replenishment oiler USNS ROBERT F. KENNEDY at a ceremony at the General Dynamics NASSCO shipyard in San Diego, CA. The 746-foot Kennedy is the fourth ship in the John Lewis-class previously known as the TAO(X). This class of oilers has the ability to carry 162,000 barrels of diesel ship fuel, aviation fuel and dry stores cargo. The upgraded oiler is built with double hulls to protect against oil spills and strengthened cargo and ballast tanks. The Lewis-class of oilers will replace the current Kaiser Class fleet replenishment oilers as they age out of the MSC fleet. Kennedy was built and christened at NASSCO. The vessel honors Robert F. Kennedy, an American lawyer and politician who served as the 64th U.S. Attorney General from January 1961 to September 1964, during his brother John F. Kennedy's presidency, where he advocated for the civil rights movement, fought against organized crime and the Mafia, and involvement in U.S. foreign policy related to Cuba.

Following testing and various qualifications and inspection, the KENNEDY will become operational and will deploy in support of national defense missions throughout the world.

SUPPORT GOOD JOBS WITH THE LABOR 411 HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

There's only a little bit of time left in the holiday shopping season to get the perfect gifts. Labor 411 has come up with a few ideas that can make your shopping easier and more ethical. Labor 411 is a research organization that raises awareness of worker-friendly goods and services. Their 2024 Holiday Gift Guide is packed with hundreds of union-made gift ideas so you can support good jobs with each dollar you spend. Happy shopping! Click [here](#) to check out the gift guide.

M.E.B.A. CALENDARS AT THE HALLS

The Calhoon M.E.B.A. Engineering School calendars that the CMES produces annually have been sent to all the Union halls where members can pick them up. The 2025 calendar looks great and gives a nod to the 150th Anniversary of the world's greatest union. The official anniversary falls on February 23, 2025 but we'll be celebrating all year round.

HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON

The M.E.B.A. wishes all our members, applicants, retirees and their families a Merry Christmas, happy holidays and a prosperous new year. M.E.B.A. halls and offices will close early on Tuesday (Christmas Eve) and remain closed on the 25th, but will be open again on Thursday and Friday of next week - Dec. 26-27. Please follow up with your local Union hall concerning holiday closings to make sure you can complete your Union business.

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

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; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing mebahq@mebaunion.org**

Thursday, January 9 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300** (Tampa meeting to be held at Coppertail Brewing Company - 2601 E 2nd Ave, Tampa, FL)

Friday, January 10 – **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. 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