

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"
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MARITIME LABOR TESTIFIES ON RED SEA ATTACKS BEFORE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE

Maritime labor was given a seat at the table in Congress this week as the House Subcommittee on Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation Subcommittee heard from witnesses discussing approaches to mitigate threats against commercial shipping in the Red Sea. SIU President Dave Heindel delivered testimony on behalf of his union, as well as the M.E.B.A., AMO, MM&P, SIU, MTD and the TTD.

Persistent attacks on international and U.S.-flag shipping in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in the southern Red Sea continue to disrupt international commerce. As a result, there has been a huge impact on the global supply chain including carriers diverting their vessels from the Red Sea and Suez Canal approaches, to the Cape of Good Hope, leading to nearly two weeks of increased transit times and additional costs. The unions said, "We have seen a 70% reduction in ship transits and a 50% reduction in cargo moving through the region...Given the importance of the Red Sea on the Suez Canal route between Asia and Southern Europe – and more importantly, the United States - it is paramount that access to these critical shipping lanes remain open."

Heindel noted that mariners have a long history of delivering the goods, often sailing into harm's way in unarmed vessels. But with attacks in the Red Sea involving technologically sophisticated threats such as attack drones, anti-ship cruise missiles, and anti-ship ballistic missiles, commercial vessels are reliant on the U.S. Navy and allies to protect them as mariners perform their jobs through this turbulent area. The unions expressed appreciation to the continued cooperation and information sharing they enjoy with the administration and military commands to ensure safe transits in the region.

However, Heindel pointed out there is great concern that the dissemination of operational security information related to shipping movements is overly available to the public, often in real-time, which helps arm adversaries with information that can be used to carry out mayhem against commercial vessels. He said, "The public dissemination of this kind of information, which can easily be rendered into actionable intelligence by the rebels in Yemen, is dangerous, and we would ask those in the

press, whether professional or amateur, those on social media and elsewhere to remember one of the axioms of the Merchant Marine: “Loose lips sink ships.”

M.E.B.A. is working to secure a comprehensive war risk package with several of our contracted companies covering M.E.B.A. mariners on vessels transiting these high-risk waters. A war bonus agreement has already been signed with Seacor/Waterman and talks with three of our other companies continue.

CMES ENJOYED RECORD ENROLLMENT LAST YEAR

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School enjoyed its highest regular course student enrollment numbers in 2023 since the Cadet Program ended in the late 1980s. The 2016-2017 years reached the enrollment heights of 2023, but those numbers were skewed because of the brief regulatory timeline foisted on mariners to complete STCW gap-closing certifications necessary to continue sailing.

Since the early 1990s, the CMES has evolved into the foremost continuing education facility for licensed officers allowing the M.E.B.A. to be the finest source of seagoing labor today. But 2023 was a banner year with a series of new courses and improved amenities that has the School running like a well-oiled machine. School Director Bryan Jennings, who took over CMES leadership in 2022, pointed to the success of recently installed courses such as Electrical Troubleshooting, LNG as a Fuel and the new MSC CONMAR course that incorporates seven individual classes required by deck and engine officers. In addition, he cited the popular High Voltage Safety course, the continued excellence of the staff and instructors, as well as the installation of the fire training rig on campus allowing another layer of convenience for students getting their necessary certifications.

The CMES expects another successful year in 2024 and will continue to offer a series of intensive courses and training that keeps our mariners on the cutting edge of ship systems and allows our membership to provide outsized value to our contracted companies.

AMO PRESIDENT DOELL RETIRES

Following over five decades of service to the American Maritime Officers (AMO), the organization’s National President Paul Doell has retired citing health reasons.

Doell joined the AMO in 1972 and worked in various roles before serving as the union’s communications director for almost 30 years. He then took over as legislative director, serving in that capacity for almost 8 years before his election as President in December 2014 and leaves office halfway through his third term. His father Ray was a founding member of AMO’s precursor, the Brotherhood of Marine Engineers. The M.E.B.A. extends its best wishes to Paul in his retirement!

The AMO executive board chose Executive V.P. Willie Barrere to serve as interim President until the next scheduled election in 2026. Barrere had served as Executive V.P. since 2021. The Board chose Inland Waters V.P. Danny Robichaux as the interim Executive V.P. until the next election.

LAWMAKERS URGE PRIORITIZATION OF MARITIME DEFENSE

19 lawmakers in the Senate and House, both Republican and Democrat, are urging President Biden to take steps to prioritize maritime defense in the wake of China’s expanding influence on the high seas as well as ongoing threats to U.S.-flag shipping, including the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

The letter points to the decline of the internationally-trading U.S.-flag fleet and shipyards that can't keep pace with their foreign counterparts.

“The United States is at an inflection point in international maritime affairs,” the letter states. “...The U.S. has failed to give proper attention to the elements of our national sea power.”

Congressman Mike Waltz (R-FL) and Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) headed up the effort calling on the President to establish an interagency maritime policy director, designate maritime infrastructure as “critical infrastructure,” invoke the Defense Production Act (DPA) for shipbuilding, and develop a whole-of-government maritime “de-risking” strategy to reduce dependency on Chinese maritime infrastructure and industry.

They noted, “America is - and will always be - a maritime nation. But after years of neglect, changing the trajectory of our shipbuilding and shipping industries is a task that will be measured in decades, not days, months, or years. We stand at an inflection point. We must act now - before it is too late - to reinvigorate American and allied maritime power on the seas.”

The letter has been posted on the M.E.B.A. website.

NTSB RECOMMENDS MARINERS WEAR PERSONAL LOCATOR DEVICES

The National Transportation Safety Board issued a safety alert urging vessel owners and operators to provide each crewmember with a personal locator device.

NTSB notes, during an emergency at sea, a mariner's chance of survival decreases if search and rescue cannot quickly and accurately identify their location. Personal locator devices, such as personal locator beacons (PLB) or satellite emergency notification devices (SEND), can accurately pinpoint a person's location. NTSB investigations found that currently available personal locator beacons provide a location accuracy of about 300 feet and a nearly instant search and rescue notification when activated.

ITF COORDINATOR DISCUSSES FOCs IN NAUTILUS PODCAST

International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) Maritime Coordinator Jacqueline Smith headlines an interesting podcast about Flag of Convenience (FOC) shipping that's worth checking out. The podcast, “Off Course: A Sideways Look at Life at Sea” hosted by Nautilus International, focuses on fascinating areas of our industry. In its latest episode it highlights the scourge of the tax dodging, floating sweatshop system that undermines legitimate flag shipping.

Smith explains that the flag on a vessel represents the country where the ship is registered, and why the ITF is calling for a global review of ship registration practices including a clearer definition of a ‘genuine link’ between a ship and its flag state – a campaign also supported by Nautilus. The podcast discusses the inherent inability of various FOC countries to enforce regulations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic – when seafarers were denied shore leave, refused repatriation and in some cases refused leave from the ship for treatment of serious medical conditions.

You can check it out at the following link where you can also peruse other interesting past podcasts: <https://www.nautilusint.org/en/creating-change/podcast-off-course/>

ITF INDEX ON GLOBAL AT-SEA WORKER ABUSE

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has launched a new online index to tackle the exploitation and abuse of workers at sea.

The Seafarers' Breach of Rights Index lists companies that deny and abuse seafarers' basic human and trade union rights – including not paying wages, failing to provide essentials including food and water, and abandoning them at sea in unsafe conditions.

Steve Trowsdale, ITF Inspectorate Coordinator said: “Seafarers not only combat the forces of nature on the world's oceans, they remain an unseen workforce, often spending many months away from loved ones in challenging living conditions.”

“We have zero tolerance for anyone who denies and abuses the rights of seafarers who work for them in any capacity. This index will name and shame companies, ship owners, ship managers, and others, who deliberately ignore and undermine seafarers' rights and international conventions that govern working and living conditions on board.”

MORE M.E.B.A. MEMBERS NEED TO PARTICIPATE IN AMC PHOTO CONTEST

The American Maritime Congress is running a Photo Contest until February 29, 2024 with a grand prize of \$1,000. Without stronger participation by our membership, the grand prize will likely go to a non-M.E.B.A. mariner – perhaps even someone non-union.

Category 1 of the contest is open to all M.E.B.A. members as well as professional mariners working on AMC-affiliated company vessels (APL, Crowley, Interlake, Keystone, Liberty Maritime, Maersk Line, Matson, NCL America, OSG, Pasha Hawaii, Patriot, and Seacor). The 1st place winner in this category will be showered with \$1,000. 2nd place takes in \$200 with 3rd place good for \$50. Category 2 of the contest is for Maritime Cadets – specifically for full-time students enrolled at one of the state maritime academies or the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA). The 1st place winner in this category will sail to victory with \$750, 2nd place rakes in \$200 and the 3rd place winner will be rewarded with \$50.

Chart your course to glory and capture the essence of life at sea! Winners will be notified by March 8, 2024, with the selection process overseen by AMC's Board of Directors. The AMC is a research and education group comprised of U.S.-flag ship owners and operators that have collective bargaining agreements with the M.E.B.A. This is your chance to showcase your unique perspective through the lens. This contest is not only a celebration of maritime life but also an opportunity to share your experiences with the world!

Photos must have been taken after January 1, 2023. Contestants must be the sole creator and copyright owner of the submitted photo. Entrants agree that submitted photos can be used by AMC for advertising purposes, with proper attribution. Multiple submissions (up to five photos) are allowed. Photos must be in their original state, without alterations. Images should be no smaller than 1MB and no larger than 5MB. Winners will be contacted via the provided email address and must respond within three business days. Submissions will not be accepted after the February 29, 2024 deadline. Visit <https://americanmaritime.org/> for full rules and additional details.

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

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

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

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

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

Friday, February 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. 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.