

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 7 – February 13, 2020



In this issue//Trump Budget Good on MSP, RRF, Bad for Food Aid, Navy Ships & Port Infrastructure//AFGE Condemns Attacks on Government Workers//WWII Artic Run Mariners Eligible for Prestigious Medal//AFL-CIO Hails Uptick of Work Actions//Hemp Products Could Threaten Your MMC//NOAA Ship Ready for Mapping Mission/Two New NOAA Ships Planned//4MF Raffle Tickets//

TRUMP BUDGET CALLS FOR FULL MSP FUNDING; FOOD AID CARGOES, NAVY SHIPBUILDING & PORT INFRASTRUCTURE REQUEST IS LACKING

President Trump's budget plan for fiscal year 2021 is encouraging for the Maritime Security Program and Ready Reserve Force, but fails to lend importance to port infrastructure and Navy shipbuilding among other oversights. The Trump budget called for full Maritime Security Program funding (\$314 million - \$5.2 million per vessel). This is the second straight year Trump has requested full MSP funding after his first two budget requests failed to assign a sustainable funding request to the Program. An industry effort in those years, that was assisted by M.E.B.A.'s Political Action Fund, ensured that full MSP funding was eventually authorized then later appropriated by Congress.

The Trump outline is also friendly to the Ready Reserve Force and urges additional RRF funding to bring in a pair of used commercial vessels that could be plugged into the fleet to replace two of the older vessels. The ships in the RRF fleet average 44 years old.

The Trump budget is not so great for food aid programs that provide cargoes for U.S.-flag shipping including the USAID-administered PL-480 Food for Peace program.

The \$4.8 trillion budget is an outline to launch the months-long Congressional budget process. However, past Trump budget outlines have been taken with a grain of salt as Congress begins the work on detailed federal agency funding bills, and this one may well prove to be no different. Senate Budget Chairman Mike Enzi (R-WY) said he won't even hold a hearing on the request. "Nobody has listened to the President in the 23 years that I've been here," he said. "Congress doesn't pay attention to the President's budget exercise."

Navy advocates were displeased with the outline's failure to support Navy shipbuilding at a level needed to strengthen the fleet. The Administration's National Defense Strategy supports a 355-ship Navy fleet, but the outline's request for only eight Navy ships wouldn't keep that goal on target and represents a 17% cut from last year.

Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT), who is Chairman of the House Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, called it a "weak, pathetic request" and said, "like so much of the rest of the President's budget, it is dead on arrival."

“It is the worst-kept secret in Washington that last-minute maneuvering led to the shipbuilding budget being robbed to pay for other pet projects by the Office of Management and Budget,” Rep. Courtney noted. “Growing the fleet – and funding the investments necessary – is either a priority for the Administration or it’s not. Unfortunately, the Defense Department leadership was unable to withstand the pressure to use the shipbuilding account as a piggy bank, even as Navy leaders have been outspoken in their concern about getting the support they need to fund our shipbuilding priorities. That sends a troubling message to those of us who have worked on a bipartisan basis in Congress to grow our fleet.”

The American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA), which represents 140 seaports, was also not impressed by the budget outline. “We’re very apprehensive about the President’s fiscal 2021 budget,” said AAPA President Chris Connor. “Adequate federal investments into U.S. port-related infrastructure, on the landside and the waterside, are crucial for the safe, efficient movement of goods so the nation can remain globally competitive, and this budget doesn’t get us there.” AAPA also criticized the budget’s proposed elimination of infrastructure grant programs that improve safety and decrease port-related diesel emissions.

The AFL-CIO released a statement expressing disappointment in the President’s plan that proposes deep cuts to critical programs that benefit working families. They noted that the budget includes \$2 trillion in cuts from safety net programs and \$1 trillion from Medicare and subsidies for the Affordable Care Act. An AFL-CIO statement said, “Two-thirds of the proposed \$1.4 trillion tax cuts, which would extend past 2025, benefit the richest 20% of all taxpayers.” The budget also would cut Labor Department funding by 10.7%, Education Department funding by 7.8%, Energy Department funding by 8.1% and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency funding by 26.5%.

AFGE BLASTS CONTINUED ATTACKS ON GOVERNMENT WORKERS

Nearly 700 labor activists representing 700,000 federal and D.C. government employees from across the country and overseas are calling on lawmakers to support the work they do on the public’s behalf and reject the White House’s efforts to undermine their jobs and eliminate their rights. Members attending the American Federation of Government Employees’ (AFGE) Legislative and Grassroots Mobilization Conference in Washington D.C. made it clear that they’re standing up for dignity, fairness, and respect on the job. “Ever since President Trump took office, we’ve faced escalating assaults on our workplace rights, because this president wants federal employees to put his personal interests above the Constitution and the American people,” AFGE National Secretary-Treasurer Everett Kelley told conference attendees Monday.

“The fact is this: For all of our victories last year, everything we’ve gained and everything we stand for remains at risk. This administration is still waging war on workers,” Kelley said.

Even as Kelley spoke, the White House was unleashing a new round of attacks on federal employees through a proposed fiscal year 2021 budget that would impose nearly \$82 billion in cuts to workers’ retirement savings through 2030. The proposal would shift more costs for health care plans onto employees and retirees, further suppress workers’ wages by denying them a meaningful pay raise next year, and slash overall spending for non-defense programs.

AFGE noted that the administration has stripped employees of negotiated rights at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Education, and it is attempting to prevent workers across the government from addressing unsafe workplaces, mismanagement, and other issues by evicting

union officials from federal worksites under the guise of three executive orders issued by President Trump in May 2018. The Department of Veterans Affairs, for instance, ordered union representatives to vacate their offices as of Feb. 7.

Several hundred AFGE members held a vigil on Tuesday in the atrium of the Hart Senate Office Building, standing silent for 20 minutes to reflect the 20 months since the Executive Orders were issued. As the conference was getting underway, attendees learned of the latest attack by this administration on workers' collective bargaining rights – a Jan. 29 memo from President Trump delegating to the Secretary of Defense the authority to remove any or all DOD employees from the law guaranteeing their right to organize.

AFGE Council 238 President Gary Morton, speaking on behalf of 7,500 EPA workers nationwide said, “We need a strong EPA now more than ever, and that means standing up for workers’ rights and scientific integrity....It’s time to end the attacks on our rights as employees – and on science itself. We’ll keep raising our voices until we win.”

LIVING WWII ARCTIC RUN MARINERS ELIGIBLE FOR PRESTIGIOUS MEDAL

The US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIA (USRJC) is seeking mariners who participated in arctic convoys during WWII who may be in line for special recognition. The USRJC, a Presidential commission, is reaching out to any U.S. Navy and Merchant Marine veterans that took part in war-related Arctic missions. They hope to honor them with the prestigious Ushakov Medal during the 75th Anniversary of the End of WWII (V-E Day), an event that will take place in May of next year. Details for the event are still being formalized. The medal, named after the patron saint of the Russian Navy, Admiral Fyodor Ushakov, is one of the country’s highest honors. The medal cannot be awarded posthumously.

If you know of a mariner who may be eligible for the medal, and/or can participate in the May ceremony, you are asked to contact the American Merchant Marine Veterans (AMMV) at their Cape Coral, FL Headquarters. You can reach Lynn Kelly, the AMMV National Office Administrator, at (475) 470-9200 or email her at ammervets@gmail.com

AFL-CIO SAYS UPTICK IN JOB ACTIONS REPRESENTS “SEA CHANGE”

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka was encouraged by the recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report that counted the involvement of 425,500 workers in major work stoppages in 2019, the highest number since 2001. Last year saw 25 major work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers, the most major work stoppages in nearly two decades. The number of working people on strike in the past two years is the most in a two-year period since the early 1980s. Trumka issued a statement saying those workers “sacrificed the comforts of today for the progress of tomorrow.”

“These strike statistics represent nothing less than a sea change in America,” he said. “Working people — completely fed up with an economic and political system that does not work for us — are turning to each other and using every tool at our disposal to win a better deal. Because of the courage of every worker who said enough is enough, we all stand on a stronger foundation today.”

“Solidarity works,” Trumka declared. “And we’re just getting started.”

COAST GUARD SAYS HEMP PRODUCT USAGE COULD RESULT IN FAILED DRUG TEST

The Coast Guard has issued a Marine Safety Advisory that warns mariners that some products made of hemp or cannabidiol (CBD) may contain enough tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) to cause a failed drug test. As mariners know, drug test failures may result in loss of their job and Merchant Mariner Credentials. The Coast Guard noted that use of hemp or CBD products is not accepted as an acceptable defense against a THC-positive drug test result. The Advisory notes, “For these reasons, mariners wishing to avoid a positive THC drug test result should exercise extreme caution when considering the use of any hemp or CBD product.

This warning applies to hemp and CBD products in any form, including those that are taken by mouth and those that are applied to the skin. THC is the primary psychoactive component of the Cannabis sativa plant. Hemp and marijuana are different strains of the Cannabis sativa plant and both contain varying concentrations of THC and CBD.

Recent changes to Federal and State laws have resulted in a surge in the availability of over-the-counter hemp products and CBD products throughout the United States. Hemp products and CBD products are marketed to the general public in several forms such as food and medicinal products, dietary supplements, oils, cosmetics, and hair products. In some cases, product manufacturers market these products as low in THC, or THC-free. Mariners should be aware that over-the-counter hemp products and CBD products have not been approved as medications by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are not regulated by the FDA. Therefore, users lack federal assurances of their ingredients, THC-content, quality, effectiveness, or safe use. As a result, mariners using these products put themselves at risk of having a THC-positive drug test result. It remains unacceptable for any U.S. Coast Guard credentialed mariner or other safety-sensitive worker working aboard a vessel that is subject to U.S. Coast Guard drug testing regulations to use THC.

NOAA MARINERS READY FOR WESTERN PACIFIC MAPPING MISSION

M.E.B.A. Government Fleet mariners sailing on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research vessel RAINIER are getting ready to deploy on the ship’s “farthest journey” of its 52-year history. The RAINIER will embark on a multidisciplinary trip to the Western Pacific to map the waters around Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands including Saipan, Rota, and Tinian. The data and observations collected will support safe navigation, coral habitat and fisheries conservation, and storm surge and tsunamis modeling. The data will also be made available to those at the local level and contribute to the larger national and global initiatives regarding comprehensive seafloor mapping. Last field season, RAINIER traveled to the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands to support diving operations for coral reef research.

Each year, the 15 ships in the NOAA fleet conduct more than 100 missions to collect data critical for nautical charts, fishery quotas, exploration of the nation’s 4.3-million-square-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, storm surge modeling and climate research.

NOAA LOOKING TO BRING TWO NEW SHIPS INTO FLEET

The design of two new vessels that will join the NOAA fleet is currently underway and the agency expects to award contracts for the construction of the ships by the end of the year. Both will be U.S.-built. The prospective new oceanographic ships are part of the agency’s fleet rebuilding effort. Once in service, the new ships will support a wide variety of missions, ranging from general oceanographic research and exploration to marine life, climate and ocean ecosystem studies.

The first ship, to be named OCEANOGRAPHER, will be homeported in Honolulu. The second, to be named DISCOVERER, will be assigned a homeport at a future date. Both ships will continue the legacies of their namesakes, the first OCEANOGRAPHER having served in the agency's fleet from 1966 to 1996 and her sister ship, DISCOVERER, from 1967 to 1996.

4MF RAFFLE TICKETS AVAILABLE AT HALLS

Tickets for the 50/50 raffle supporting the M.E.B.A. Merchant Marine Memorial Foundation (4MF) are now available at all M.E.B.A. Union halls as well as the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School, Headquarters and POID (through April Fleischer). Members, applicants, retirees and everyone else are strongly encouraged to support the 4MF which provides upkeep and improvements to the Memorial Park located at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School (CMES). The Memorial honors fallen mariners who helped blaze the proud tradition our members continue today. The winning raffle ticket (\$2 apiece) will be drawn on October 6, 2020 at the CMES during the monthly membership meeting. You do not need to be present to win. The grand winner will receive 50% of the proceeds from raffle sales – so plan to purchase a thick stack of tickets. The popular swag giveaway promotion will be in effect for this raffle for those who buy at least \$50 worth of tickets. Members are urged to keep M.E.B.A.'s Memorial in mind all year long and support it when they can.

HALLS, OFFICES CLOSED MONDAY FOR PRESIDENTS DAY

As always, the third Monday in February marks the observance of Presidents Day. M.E.B.A. halls and offices will be closed on February 17.

REGULAR MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Monday, March 2 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;
Tuesday, March 3 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;
Wednesday, March 4 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;
Thursday, March 5 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;
Friday, March 6 – 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. 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 Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram.