

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*  
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## **U.S. SHIPS ARE NOW FAVORITE HOUTHİ TARGETS AS ACTION IN RED SEA CONTINUES**

The situation in the Red Sea near Yemen remains volatile and attacks from Houthi rebels continue unabated as mariners in that part of the world, including M.E.B.A. officers, have targets on their backs as they carry out their jobs.

The U.S. launched another round of retaliatory strikes against Houthi targets last night on the heels of another rebel drone attack against the U.S.-owned (Marshall Islands-flagged) bulk carrier GENCO PICARDY Wednesday night. Last week, another U.S.-owned (Marshall Islands-flagged) container ship, the M/V GIBRALTER EAGLE was hit by a ballistic missile launched by Houthi rebels. No one was hurt in either incident. It was reported there was a previous recent attempt by Houthis to launch an anti-ship ballistic missile at a U.S. target though the attempt failed and the missile landed in Yemen. Additionally, the rebels targeted the Navy vessel USS LABOON with an anti-ship cruise missile, but the guided-missile destroyer successfully repelled the attack. Following the attack on the EAGLE last week, the U.S. and United Kingdom took action by striking at least 30 Houthi sites on Thursday and Friday.

In recent days, U.S. Navy SEALs operating from the USS LEWIS PULLER boarded a dhow near the coast of Somalia and seized Iranian-made ballistic missile and cruise missile components that were being transported to the Houthis to continue their mayhem.

The Commander of the U.S. Central Command General Michael Kurilla said that, "it is clear that Iran continues shipment of advanced lethal aid to the Houthis. This is yet another example of how Iran actively sows instability throughout the region in direct violation of U.N. Security Resolution 2216 and international law. We will continue to work with regional and international partners to expose and interdict these efforts, and ultimately to reestablish freedom of navigation."

Tensions continue to escalate in the region, with the Houthis expressing their intent to target any ship associated with Israel, either through its origin, destination, or affiliation with Israeli businesses. A Houthi spokesperson announced the rebel group would now extend their attacks to any American-affiliated ship. In response to the growing threat, the Maritime Administration issued another warning to commercial ships sailing through the Red Sea. The advisory recommends that

U.S.-flag and U.S.-owned commercial vessels consider remaining North of 18N in the Red Sea or East of 46E in the Gulf of Aden until further notice.

A letter sent to the White House from the M.E.B.A. and all the U.S. maritime unions along with the ITD and MTD thanks the Administration for its protection of U.S. commercial assets in that part of the world as well as the strikes against the Houthis that demonstrate the consequences of attacks on U.S. shipping. The letter states, “Your protection of U.S.-flag assets in this situation has demonstrated to other carriers that the United States is committed to protecting its shipping, which we hope will incentivize other carriers to put their vessels under the U.S.-flag, enhancing the United States Merchant Marine.” The letter has been posted on the M.E.B.A. website located at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org)

### **M.E.B.A. HERALDED AS OSA “LABOR HEROES OF 2023”**

The Organization of Staff Analysts (OSA) tapped the M.E.B.A. as its Labor Heroes of 2023 after our Union secured the recent landmark contract covering members on New York’s Staten Island Ferry system. That followed a 13-year battle by the M.E.B.A. that transformed the unit from the lowest to the highest paid public ferry system in the country. The OSA represents City of New York employees in the Analyst title series serving in more than 50 City agencies. In a half page spread that appeared in the New York City labor newspaper “The Chief,” OSA lauded our Union “and all M.E.B.A. Members” for the successful battle that further improved life for our hardworking membership. The OSA tribute to the M.E.B.A. stated:

“New York City officials, faced with ambitious contract demands by municipal unions, typically play the waiting game. They figure time is on their side. Money they aren’t paying out is gathering interest, while workers with housing and grocery expenses that tend to rise over time have difficulty holding out for what they and their leaders consider fair terms. Unions with the nerve and patience to try sometimes find that delays of months in replacing expired wage agreements can turn into years.

Recently, Staten Island Ferry workers saw their faith in their union and Marine Engineers’ Beneficial Association Secretary-Treasurer Roland “Rex” Rexha justified when they announced a deal – on Labor Day – that more than doubled salaries for Captains and Chief Marine Engineers nearly 13 years after their old pact ran out. By the time it expires in early 2027, the record length contract will have raised Captains’ pay from \$71,000 to \$180,000, with a similar boost for Chief Marine Engineers.

Those huge increase, supplemented by large chunks of back pay and improved vacation benefits (with some costs offset by money-saving changes in work hours and overtime rates) were made possible by M.E.B.A.’s willingness to use the Prevailing Wage Law to get a favorable ruling from the City’s office of Administrative Trials and Hearings that prompted City Comptroller Brad Lander to put his stamp on the contract terms. During the press conference announcing the final deal, Secretary-Treasurer Rexha praised Mayor Adams as “a mayor who truly values the hard work of our members and comprehends the challenges our mariners face day in and day out.”

But it couldn’t have happened without the willingness of M.E.B.A. leadership, with the support of rank and file through a lengthy period of financial sacrifice, to defy an intransigent Mayor Bloomberg and then endure nearly another decade without a raise before their decision was

validated. For that achievement, the Organization of Staff Analysts is proud to honor the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association and its members as our Labor Heroes of 2023.”

### **REDUCED NOLA HOURS WHILE REP. SEARCH CONTINUES**

Operating hours for M.E.B.A.'s Union hall in New Orleans are being scaled back while the search for a permanent Representative/Dispatcher there continues. In the short term, the hall will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Central Standard Time) each weekday. Those seeking service on the Gulf Coast at earlier hours can rely on the Houston hall – 8 am – 4 pm (CST) and the Tampa hall 9 am-5 pm (EST).

M.E.B.A. is accepting resumes for those interested in serving as Representative/Dispatcher in our New Orleans Union hall. Any member or retiree who wants to be considered for the position should send a brief résumé in short form to Gulf Coast Vice President Adam Smith at [asmith@mebaunion.org](mailto:asmith@mebaunion.org) or Secretary-Treasurer Roland Rexha at [rrexha@mebaunion.org](mailto:rrexha@mebaunion.org).

### **GREAT LAKES SHIPPING SEASON ENDS AS WINTER WORK TUNES UP**

Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan's Soo Locks closed to marine traffic last week signaling the end of the Great Lakes shipping season that lasted longer than most because of warmer weather and low ice cover. M.E.B.A.-contracted Interlake Steamship vessels will sit on the sidelines for about 2½ months as seasonal maintenance and repairs begin.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans extensive off-season work on the Poe and MacArthur Locks as well as throughout the system. The Soo Locks have two operating locks: the Poe Lock, scheduled to reopen March 25, and the MacArthur Lock, scheduled to reopen April 24. More than 4,500 vessels, carrying up to 80 million tons of cargo, maneuver through the locks annually. Iron ore, coal, wheat and limestone are among the most frequently carried commodities. Opened in 1969, the Poe Lock is 1,200 feet long. The MacArthur Lock was opened in 1943 and is 800 feet long.

Following an agreement secured two years ago with Interlake, our members will continue to work aboard company vessels as needed under M.E.B.A. contract during the winter layup at various shipyards & docks in and around the Great Lakes. Winter work previously was not part of the Union's collective bargaining agreement with the company. Such maintenance and repair work had previously been conducted by a mixture of direct employees, contractors, and shipyard/ship repair companies of skilled workers, typically non-union.

### **NEW CLASS OF MSC MEDICAL SHIPS TO RELIEVE COMFORT & MERCY NAMED**

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro announced that the Military Sealift Command's future class of Expeditionary Medical Ships are currently taking shape. Austal USA will construct the first three EMS vessels which are being called the "Bethesda-class" with the first ship to be named USNS BETHESDA. The name selection follows the tradition of naming expeditionary medical ships after U.S. military hospitals. The EMS vessels will be a variant of the Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF) model. 13 EPFs are already sailing on various missions around the world with M.E.B.A.-represented Engine Officers aboard.

Secretary Del Toro said, "This ship, as well as all the Bethesda-class of expeditionary medical ships, is designed to provide hospital-level care in austere environments, and will serve not just our sailors and mariners, but offer assistance and comfort to our allies and partners around the globe in times

of need. Most of all, USNS BETHESDA will serve as a beacon of hope, of comfort, of mercy, and of the American people's enduring friendship to all she supports around the globe.”

Bethesda-class expeditionary medical ships are designed as a dedicated medical ship that optimizes hospital-level medical care in support of distributed maritime operations (DMO). EMS will feature a shallow draft enabling greater reach and allowing direct access to shallow ports, while also providing a flight deck that accommodates military helicopters.

The EMS design will provide a full range of medical capabilities including triage/critical care, three operating rooms, medical laboratory, radiological capability, blood bank, dental, mental health, OB/GYN and primary care, rapid stabilization and follow-on evacuation of multiple casualties and combat search and rescue including recovery at sea. The primary mission of the EMS as a high-speed forward-deployed medical ship is to provide rapid responsive sea-based and near-shore hospital level critical care, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, non-combatant evacuation operations and special operations. The EMS is designed to respond and provide care at a more rapid pace than their predecessors, USNS MERCY and USNS COMFORT, sailing at speeds of at least 30 knots with a range of 5,500 nautical miles at 24 knots.

### **ATTEMPT TO EXTEND JANUS RULING IN ALASKA IS BATTED BACK**

The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to take up an appeal brought by Alaska's Governor to further weaken public sector employee unions in that state. The high court's action thus upholds a lower court ruling overturning Governor Mike Dunleavy's bid to simplify the process for state workers to opt out of paying union dues.

The justices chose not to entertain the state's appeal, upholding the Alaska Supreme Court's ruling that determined a union's collection of dues from public employees did not violate their free speech rights under the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, even without explicit written consent. Gov. Dunleavy had issued an administrative order in 2019 restricting unions from collecting dues unless workers filled out specific forms authorizing the deductions. When lower courts invalidated this policy, the State appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

With a conservative majority of 6-3, the Supreme Court has consistently leaned towards limiting the power of labor unions in recent years. The Alaska case aligns with previous efforts by conservative groups to expand the reach of the Court's 2018 ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME*. In that landmark decision, the Court held that government workers not joining their representing unions cannot be compelled to pay fees covering collective bargaining costs.

While the *Janus* ruling was hailed as a victory for opponents of public-sector unions, its predicted devastating impact on union finances did not materialize. In 2019, Alaska sued the Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA), representing a substantial portion of state employees, challenging its dues collection procedures. ASEA, affiliated with the Association of Federal, State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), allows members to revoke their membership only during a 10-day annual period, a policy the union claims was unaffected by the *Janus* decision.

The state argued that limiting the timeframe for workers to opt out of union membership infringed on their First Amendment rights. However, both a state judge and the Alaska Supreme Court, in 2023, dismissed the case, supporting the union's stance. Alaska garnered support from 11 other

Republican-led states, various conservative groups, and Mark Janus, the plaintiff in the 2018 Supreme Court decision, but their efforts were unsuccessful in challenging the courts' rulings.

### **AMC IS REWARDING SHUTTERBUGS**

The American Maritime Congress is running a Photo Contest until February 29, 2024 with a grand prize of \$1,000. 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 1<sup>st</sup> place winner in this category will be showered with \$1,000. 2<sup>nd</sup> place takes in \$200 with 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> place winner in this category will sail to victory with \$750, 2<sup>nd</sup> place rakes in \$200 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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.***