SIU Officials Meet With MSC Leadership

Union Uses Forum to Address Issues Important to Civilian Mariners

Top SIU officials met with Military Sealift Command (MSC) leadership in May to discuss issues important to MSC CIVMARS.

Held May 20 in Washington, D.C. as part of a semi-annual labor-management forum, the meeting included SIU President Michael Sacco, Executive Vice President Augie Tellez, Vice President Contracts George Tricker, Government Services Rep. Kate Hunt and SIU Counsel Deborah Kleinberg. They met with MSC Commander Rear Adm. Thomas K. Shannon, MSC Deputy Commander Rear Adm. Lawrence Jackson and MSC program representatives. Officials from other maritime unions were also in attendance.

“These meetings provide a way to keep the lines of communication open with MSC to discuss issues that have a significant impact and are important to every CIVMAR,” Sacco said. “They help everyone stay aware of how our labor-management relationship is functioning. Keeping track of how issues are moving and how significant concerns are being addressed is very important to the union.”

Many of the agenda items were specifically related to the unlicensed CIVMAR bargaining unit. The agenda addressed MSC’s joint high-speed vessels (JHSV), including SIU concerns related to operations tempo, fire foam equipment, CIVMAR leave, vessel visitors and passengers and possible incentives for CIVMARS sailing in the JHSV program.

The SIU also spoke about CIVMAR concerns related to workers’ compensation claims processing. Some individual workers’ compensation problems were resolved shortly after the meeting. Alternative dispute resolution processing and problems achieving reasonable accommodations for CIVMARS – including accommodations for pregnant mariners – were also addressed.

The MSC’s policy regarding the failure to maintain a work schedule, the new Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) payroll system and an MSC information technology update were also touched upon during the high-level meeting.

Once the scope of the problems was discussed at the meeting, an outcome list was generated and follow-up tasks were identified. Union representatives said they would work on the list with MSC representatives to ensure positive outcomes for the issues, many of which impact unlicensed CIVMARS in MSC’s East and West Coast fleets.

By a 2009 executive order from President Barack Obama, labor-management forums are designed to promote better labor-management partnerships throughout the federal government, address mission-related issues and promote involvement among employees and their unions.

As part of the executive order, each federal agency is required to have a labor-management council, which holds forums with labor leaders. The purpose of the forums are to gather labor-management council members together to address issues or problems currently facing the agency or workforce.

The SIU will continue to update CIVMARS about these topics in upcoming issues of the Federal Mariner and via CIVMAR-GRAMS. To ensure you receive union messages about important topics as soon as they are issued to the Federal Mariner list-serve, send your email address to siufedmariner@seafarers.org.

Seafarers Assist With Sunken Korean Ferry Recovery

SIU federal mariners recently took part in a search and recovery effort that grabbed headlines around the world.

On April 16, a South Korean ferry, the MV Sewol, capsized during a trip between Incheon and Jeju while carrying 476 people.

More than 300 have been listed as dead or still missing and the ongoing recovery effort has become a conversation around the world.

To help its South Korean allies, the United States launched an American recovery effort that included the USNS Safeguard, which is crewed with SIU Government Services mariners. The Safeguard was also assisted by the Seafarers-crewed, TOTE-operated USNS Wheeler and its support boat, the USNS Fair Tempo.

Arriving at the site of the tragic Sewol sinking in late April, the Safeguard provided support to the U.S. Navy’s recovery effort, including the use of its recompression chamber. That chamber was especially useful to Navy divers as it allowed them to get used to normal conditions following their operations deep under the water.

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Recognizing Your Service

I’ve always been proud of our union’s work with our Government Services unit and their agency employers. We have federal mariners on ACOE, MARAD, NOAA and MSC vessels around the world, working tirelessly on all types of jobs that advance American interests. It’s a high calling and we are proud to support all federal mariners who answer that call.

In this issue, for example, you can read about the work done by SIU federal mariners aboard the USNS Safeguard. They were recently part of the U.S. Navy’s response to the aftermath of the sinking of the Korean passenger ferry MV Sewol. Our members worked alongside their Navy colleagues to help in the recovery effort during tragic circumstances. Federal mariners are always ready to serve, and that story shows the commitment firsthand.

It was gratifying to see that effort, along with the service of millions of American civil servants, being acknowledged recently during Public Service Recognition Week. Held May 2-10, Public Service Recognition Week turned the eyes of the nation on federal workers and celebrated those working in federal agencies both at home and abroad, including SIU Government Services mariners. There was a huge exhibit on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and statements of recognition from President Obama and Congress were presented.

When I saw President Obama’s statement about the “unmatched perseverance” federal workers had when delivering “the critical resources and services so many Americans depend on,” I felt like he was describing our government services mariners to a T. Your work is unequaled around the world, and it’s nice to see our country is grateful for all you do. By the way, you can find the president’s full Public Service Recognition Week statement on this same page.

Speaking of federal service work, I was happy to take part recently in a labor-management forum with MSC. We discussed a variety of issues important to SIU CIVMARS, and you can read about the meeting in this edition of The Federal Mariner.

These forums are incredibly important because they ensure there’s a running dialogue between our members and the agencies that employ them. While we are proud of our federal agency partnerships and the work done around the world, the SIU first and foremost is dedicated to ensuring our members get a fair shake when they’re on the job. With that in mind, we use these meetings to address issues or make sure airline travel costs are reimbursed. CIVMARS follow these processes until the final settlement is reached.

In April, the SIU met with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Personnel and Readiness (SATO) or with the assistance of the MSC. Additionally, should CIVMARS need to change their original travel arrangements, MSC recommends they use the same procedures and contact the offices noted above. It is recommended that CIVMARS follow these processes until the final processes are negotiated.

Tickets purchased by housing agents are also in a category of tickets that will not be reimbursable when processing a travel claim submitted by CIVMARS.

Should you have any questions or concerns, call your SIU Government Services representative or send your questions and comments to siugovernmentservices@siu.org.

I am pleased to join in observing Public Service Recognition Week. 

A government of, by and for the people relies on dedicated citizens eager to carry out the necessary work of self-government. Every day, public employees like you assume this responsibility with passion and professionalism at the Federal, state, county and local levels.

With unmatched perseverance, you deliver the critical resources and services so many Americans depend on. You defend our country abroad and provide our service members with the care they deserve when they return home. You push the boundaries of science, which keeps America on the cutting edge of innovation. You support small business, guard our civil rights, educate our next generation, and help hundreds of thousands experience the wonder of our national parks and treasures.

Each of you has specific duties you perform on behalf of our people, and together, public servants like you form the government our citizens can count on and serve to meet the high expectations they set. Whether you recently came to public service to build a brighter tomorrow or you are a career employee who has dedicated your life to this pursuit, I am deeply grateful for your commitment to the American people, and I wish you all the best.

President Obama Thanks Federal Workers for Dedicated Service

Editor’s note: Following is a statement released by President Barack Obama in honor of Public Service Recognition Week, which was held May 2-10.

The SIU is updating unlicensed CIVMARS with guidance for the purchase of commercial airline tickets.

The SIU is currently negotiating with Military Sealift Command (MSC) on a travel advisory policy that will provide unlicensed CIVMARS with thorough and complete guidance on how to purchase commercial airline tickets for travel to and from assignments, leave periods, training and other types of travel.

The SIU has heard from CIVMARS there may be some confusion and different practices throughout the fleet regarding how unlicensed CIVMARS should navigate the process of purchasing commercial airline tickets.

Until the SIU completes negotiations and a new travel policy is distributed to the fleet, unlicensed CIVMARS should be aware that there are ways to make sure airline travel costs are reimbursed.

To make sure CIVMARS are fully protected from financial loss and reimbursed for their airline tickets, the SIU recommends they secure their tickets through the Navy Passenger Transportation Office (Navy PT), Scheduled Air Transportation Office (SATO) or with the assistance of the MSC. Additionally, should CIVMARS need to change their original travel arrangements, MSC recommends they use the same procedures and contact the offices noted above. It is recommended that CIVMARS follow these processes until the final processes are negotiated.

Tickets purchased by housing agents are also in a category of tickets that will not be reimbursable when processing a travel claim submitted by CIVMARS.

If you are on a vessel, you may also receive guidance and assistance from the ship’s purser or the ship’s licensed officer who may be acting as the purser.

The SIU will continue to keep all unlicensed CIVMARS updated about the progress of the negotiations.

Should you have any questions or concerns, call your SIU Government Services representative or send your questions and comments to siugovernmentservices@siu.org.

Federal Mariners Take Part in ‘Freedom Banner’

Members of the SIU Government Services Division, sailing aboard the USNS Sacagawea, played important roles in the annual Freedom Banner exercise testing U.S. sealift capability. This photo from April 11 in the East China Sea shows the CIVMARs crewed interest participating in the drill with a Marine Corps CH-53 Super Stallion helicopter. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Lance Burleson)
Understanding Your Benefits and How to Secure Them

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Individual Situations Should Determine How TSP is Allocated

Safeguard Assisted in Korea by Fellow Seafarers-Crewed Vessels

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“Safeguard” was running low on some supplies and was making a large backlog of mail in Busan, South Korea. Meanwhile, a large amount of trash was piling up in the area. Macario wrote in an email. On May 12, the Tempo, a 160-foot support vessel, made the trip to the Safeguard as part of the Tempo’s crew. The 17 pallets of supplies and the duplexer were loaded aboard. Petty Officer 3rd Class Terry Gonzaga, assisted by Alis Carlos Gentile, Tony Olaya, Edeln Renegado and Kyle Silva. The vessel quickly made its way to the Safeguard to unload its supplies and gather the Safeguard’s trash. By 6 a.m. May 14, the Tempo had returned to Busan with over $3,000 in cash, small, capitalization (S), and international stock (I) funds. According to the federal government, in 2013 the G fund had a return of 1.89 percent, while the C fund had a 32.45 percent return; the S fund had 38.35 percent; and the I fund returned 22.13 percent. Such returns could be beneficial for younger workers, who have more time to wait out setbacks and bull in the stock market. Besides, the long-term return of stock investments are generally much higher than the return on government securities, which make up the TSP’s G fund. Whether or not this new bill becomes law, all federal workers are encouraged to examine their individual situation and select the TSP retirement options that are best suited to them. The SIU, meanwhile, will keep you updated as the bill proceeds through Congress. You can find more information on TSP investing at the Office of Personnel Management site at www.opm.gov or the TSP site at www.tsp.gov.

Remember, TSP rules change, and you should also check for the most recent information and seek advice from professional advisors before making investment decisions.

Safeguard Assisted in Korea by Fellow Seafarers-Crewed Vessels

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“For our part, we conducted a lot of small boat searches in very rough seas and we made use of the helicopters as well. The helicopter was impossible not to feel the weight of the work they were doing. As a result, there were no Safe guards felt sad for the families of the victims,” he said. “Our hearts went out to them.”

Compassion for the families, added Bosun James Gage, worked to further motivate the crew as they worked through sometimes extreme weather conditions. “Out of respect for those who died, our involvement focused on broad area searches of the surrounding area,” he said. “The water was really cold and you could see that there was a lot of drift current in the area. As a result, whether or not searches were successful, only that we safely launched and recovered our boats daily at the end of the day.” As the mission stretched into May, another SIU-crewed operation was launched. Capt. Glenn Macario of the Wheeler said his vessel’s supply ship, the Fast Tempo, was selected to do the job. “The Safeguard was running low on some supplies and was making a large backlog of mail in Busan, South Korea. Meanwhile, a large amount of trash was piling up in the area. Macario wrote in an email. On May 12, the Tempo, a 160-foot support vessel, made the trip to the Safeguard as part of the Tempo’s crew. The 17 pallets of supplies and the duplexer were loaded aboard. Petty Officer 3rd Class Terry Gonzaga, assisted by Alis Carlos Gentile, Tony Olaya, Edeln Renegado and Kyle Silva.”

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SIU officials and staff members were active in this year’s congressional “Sail-In,” a day-long event on Capitol Hill that emphasizes the importance of America’s maritime industry and the role of Seafarers and federal mariners.

SIU Executive Vice President Angie Teller, Vice President Contracts George Tricker and Vice President West Coast Nick Marrone each served separately on one of 24 meeting groups composed of representatives from throughout the industry. Those groups – totaling around 310 individuals – met with senators, congressional representatives and staff members from mid-morning to late afternoon May 7.

This was the fifth straight year of the Sail-In, organized by the U.S. Maritime Coalition, to which the SIU is affiliated. As in previous events, the meetings involved a mix of longtime industry supporters from both political parties as well as newer members of Congress who may not have been familiar with maritime. Also is in past years, central topics included the Maritime Security Program, the Jones Act, and cargo preference including Food for Peace.

Before participants scattered throughout the three House and three Senate office buildings, Acting Maritime Administrator Chip Jaenichen addressed them. He said the Maritime Administration fully supports the Sail-In, and added that it’s more important than ever to spread the word about the industry’s importance to U.S. national and economic security.

Mariners and the maritime community “have long been what I would call the unseen, silent servants of our economy,” he said. “Our nation, as we know, would not be the same without our maritime industry and our seafaring trade, and we need to let the American people know that. The U.S. Merchant Marine has been integral to every armed conflict since the American Revolution…. Our nation owes a great debt to the U.S. Merchant Marine.”

The Sail-In included participants from almost every segment of the American maritime industry engaged in the transport of waterborne cargo, including maritime labor, vessel operators, marine terminals, shipyards and more. Collectively, the domestic industry alone moves nearly 888 million tons of cargo every year and plays an important role in relieving congestion on the nation’s crowded roads and railways.

“This is an exciting time for American maritime. The industry is investing billions of dollars to meet the nation’s transportation needs; it is creating thousands of jobs for Americans; and it consistently works to bolster our national security at zero cost to the federal government.”

Capt. Richard Phillips, whose rescue from Somali pirates was made into an Oscar-winning film starring Tom Hanks, also participated in this year’s Sail-In. He noted that the strength of America’s merchant marine comes in part from the Jones Act, which boosts our nation’s economy while also strengthening America’s national and homeland security.

“The nation’s merchant mariners are some of the most highly trained in the world and are prepared for any situation they may encounter,” Phillips said. “Most importantly, the men and women of American maritime are proud stewards of our nation’s waterways, because not only do they work in these communities, they also live in them.”

### How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy. The union’s website – www.seafarers.org – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at: www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmarp.asp

Forms are also available under “union forms” in the SIU membership tab.

### Contact Information

Asst. Vice President Government Services Chick Wheeler:
Phone: (510) 444-2360, ext. 17
Email: cwhedler@seafarers.org

Government Services Fleet Representative
Kate Hunt:
Phone: (201) 434-6000, ext. 223
Email: khunt@seafarers.org

Contact us with an SIU site at: info@seafarers.org
Find us on Facebook:
Click on icon at www.seafarers.org

SIU Helps Deliver Pro-Maritime Messages to Congress

Whether a federal mariner is accessing information through the union’s website or sharing photos and comments on the SIU’s social media sites, there are lots of ways to stay connected. Here’s a quick look at some of the information available to federal mariners:

- **Text Messaging.** Mariners can sign up for SIU text alerts by sending the word “join” (without the quotation marks) to 97779. It will generally only be used for important information through the union’s website or the homepage at www.seafarers.org. The SIU’s social media pages are linked on the homepage at www.seafarers.org – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at: www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmarp.asp

- **Printable Website.** The SIU late last year launched a mobile version. Just type the web address for the home page into any mobile browser and it should automatically redirect to the mobile site. Most pages have been optimized for mobile browsing, although visitors may scroll to the bottom of nearly any page and select “Classic” if they’d rather view the traditional design.

- **Good Old Seafarers.** Launched in 1997, the union’s website features general SIU-specific news items, current and past issues of the *Federal Mariner* and Seafarers *LOG*, lists of all the union halls and membership meeting dates and photos galleries.

Since their formation, seafaring unions have fought hard to improve health, safety and living conditions for all sea-going employees.

Habitability pay for CIVMARS is a direct result of the arbitrations (legal cases) the SIU and the NMU have brought on behalf of federal mariners to ensure adequate habitability aboard vessels and in shore-side lodging. If habitability conditions are inadequate and cannot be improved, these cases ensure CIVMARS receive habitability pay. Read on for more about the history of this important topic.

The SIU and NMU – which merged in 2001 – began litigating for safe and healthy living environments in a case involving the USNS Glover in 1991. The next case was to protect mariners aboard the USNS Comfort. In 2007, arbitration was brought on behalf of mariners aboard the East Coast CSU when hotel accommodations were extremely substandard. The union won an award of more $750,000 worth of back pay for CIVMARS housed in that hotel, in addition to $57,000 in attorney’s fees. Attorney’s fees won in arbitration cases go directly into a fund that continues to help pay for the significant costs associated with pressing ahead with arbitrations on behalf of federal mariners.

In 2008, 2009, and 2010 the union arbitrated three more inadequate habitability cases – Comfort II, USNS Grampus and Grapple – and won all three arbitrations. These victories were accomplished with the help of CIVMARS who provided testimony and information allowing the union to construct strong, successful cases for the collective good of all unincorporated mariners.

In 2010, after significant and successive union victories, Military Sea-Lift Command (MSC) agreed to begin negotiating on habitability pay. The SIU and MSC arrived at a comprehensive negotiated agreement to allow automatic shipboard habitability pay when habitability conditions fell below a certain standard. In addition to pay, and as important for CIVMARS protection, a process was developed to allow union representatives to participate in habitability committees with MSC representatives. In these committees, the SIU and MSC negotiate shipboard conditions early in the renovation process of older vessels or the development of a new ship.

After almost 25 years of strong and persistent union advocacy, arbitrations and negotiations, today’s CIVMARS is protected by a robust CIVMARs and union efforts, habitability concerns are always in the forefront of all issues considered by MSC when modifying vessels or planning for new construction.

What can you do to ensure your health, safety, comfort and economic security? Support the collective good. Support the SIU. JOIN NOW!