



# THE FEDERAL MARINER

MSC • NOAA • ARMY COE • MARAD

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## Retroactive Comp Time for Travel Award Available to Eligible MSC CIVMARS

As reported previously on the SIU CIVMARS list serve and in East and West Coast CSU union meetings, the SIU and the Military Sealift Command (MSC) have reached agreement on the retroactive compensation time for travel (CTFT) award for eligible MSC CIVMARS.

CIVMARS may request compensation time for travel when they travel to and from assignments or training outside of their normal work hours. This negotiated award covers the period of time when MSC did not provide the CTFT (though it should have).

"This wraps up a multi-year negotiation, and the SIU negotiated an excellent retroactive award for MSC CIVMARS who are entitled to this time," SIU Assistant Vice President Chet Wheeler reported. "Using Interest Based Bargaining

(IBB) negotiations and resources from the AFL-CIO helped reach this comprehensive agreement. All unlicensed CIVMARS, union and non-union members benefited from these negotiations. Depending upon a CIVMARS'S length of service with MSC, a CIVMARS may be awarded up to approximately 2.5 weeks of additional leave."

As a result of the SIU's strenuous and determined advocacy over several years, the agreement provides CIVMARS two (2) hours of comp time for each month a CIVMARS worked for MSC between May 1, 2008 and December 31, 2013. CIVMARS must still be working with MSC to be entitled to this award.

CIVMARS can find the hours awarded to them by checking their Leave and Earning Statement (LES).

If you are eligible for a retroactive payment it will be noted on your LES.

To ensure that CIVMARS will not forfeit any of this time, it must be used within two years of the date it was awarded. (Again, that date is on your LES.) CIVMARS should request this leave using the same procedures currently used to request other types of leave, using a Request for Leave or Approved Absence Form. You must note that you are asking for "Retroactive Comp time for Travel."

"All CIVMARS should plan carefully as to how you will use this leave," SIU Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain explained. "If you have a significant amount of accumulated annual leave time, you don't want to forfeit annual leave ei-

ther. There is a way to organize and request your leave time and file the appropriate forms so that generally, you can preserve all your leave time. If you must give up your annual leave, there is a way to donate it to other CIVMARS in need."

SIU union members can request help organizing their leave time and protecting themselves from leave forfeiture by contacting their union representatives or e-mailing [siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org).

If you have not joined the union you can get an SIU membership application (Form 1187) by contacting your union representative (see box on page 3) or downloading the application from the Seafarers International Union website. From the home page, look in the SIU Membership menu and then click on Union Forms.

## Tried and True Mantra: Shipboard Safety Doesn't Happen by Accident

Most collective bargaining agreements have safety provisions and most agencies have many policies and procedures covering safe ship practices, but sometimes these written policies are not enough to ensure safety.

With the Military Sealift Command's (MSC) focus on fleet-wide safety after a year of increased accidents and safety incidents, the SIU is asking all federal mariners from all units – SUISAN BAY-MARAD, ACOE, NOAA and MSC – to enhance their reporting efforts to the union when they believe they have encountered an unsafe working condition.

In the past, federal mariners have expressed concern and fear of retaliation if they come forward with a safety issue. This should not be a concern of mariners for several reasons. First, the SIU believes most agency representatives and ship supervisors are interested in preventing accidents and promoting a safe work environment. Second, if you believe you have been retaliated against

as a result of a safety report, the union will investigate the situation and will support and assist SIU bargaining-unit federal mariners in resolving the issue.

At the last MSC-Labor Management Council in Baltimore, the SIU had requested information about safety statistics in general and proposed the establishment of a joint labor-management safety committee. This request was agreed to and in conjunction with it, MSC's commanding officer, Rear Adm. T.K. Shannon reported he had directed that the agency establish a cross-functional team to examine the cause of the increased accidents with government owned and operated vessels as well as MSC contracted vessels crewed by SIU mariners.

The MSC leadership hoped that by using a broad-based cross-functional team, delving into the root causes of these accidents and enhancing MSC's safety culture, accidents would be reduced. The SIU wholeheartedly sup-

ports this effort. Everyone learns when there is transparency surrounding these events and an honest effort is made to learn from mistakes.

Serious accidents don't only impact a mariner, but also his or her family. The consequences can be severe. In addition to wages being diminished for the injured worker, caregiving responsibilities can impact a spouse or partner's ability to keep his or her job as well. If you are hurt on the job, worker's comp pay is less than a regular salary. The economics of getting hurt may mean a mariner can't keep up with his or her bills. This in turn may mean greater debt and a negative impact on your credit report. For those mariners who hold security clearances, please note that a negative credit report may create a situation where your clearance isn't renewed or is pulled. Without a clearance, some mariners may be unable to sail.

For dues-paying federal mariners, help with transportation home from

outside the U.S., seeking filing assistance with the Department of Labor's Workers Compensation Division, assistance with leave and attendance issues, review of fitness-for-duty by MSC's medical department, security clearance questions, and other issues involved in job injuries are part of the help you receive by being a union member.

In spring 2016 the SIU will begin the joint labor-management safety committee work with MSC. The SIU anticipates starting similar work at SUISAN Bay-MARAD in late spring. The SIU currently addresses any safety issues brought to its attention from NOAA and ACOE bargaining unit members as well.

All federal mariners are encouraged to contact the union with safety concerns or ideas as to how to improve safety. If you see something unsafe, don't be scared to say something – report your concern to your union representative and appropriate shipboard department heads..

## SIU, NOAA to Begin Contract Negotiations; NOAA Union Members Urged to Submit Proposals, Suggestions

Kate Hunt, SIU East Coast Government Services Representative, reports that the SIU has sent a formal request to NOAA asking to re-open the existing collective bargaining agreement between the parties. The union is hopeful

that contract negotiations will begin this spring.

"This will be a tremendous effort and I urge all NOAA mariners who are members of the SIU to take part in the preparation for this new agreement. We need

members to get involved, send their suggestions for improvements and propose revisions for the negotiations," Hunt said.

Negotiations will take place in Norfolk, Virginia. If you are not an SIU member but would like to be part of

the negotiation preparation, check out the information box on page 3 of this edition for instructions on how to join.

*The Federal Mariner* will update the NOAA fleet as more information becomes available.

## Register to Vote

All federal mariners are strongly encouraged to vote on Election Day (or by absentee ballot during the election period). Detailed information about voter registration is available online at:

<https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote>

Via that website, depending on one's state of residence, a visitor can either register directly online (23 states offer online registration) or complete the National Mail Voter Registration Form and then print, sign and mail it to the address listed under the user's state in the individual "State Instructions."

The website also includes information about voter eligibility, voting by absentee ballot, finding local election offices and much more.

This election is especially important for all federal employees as Republican and Democratic candidates have very different ideas about changes to how civil service employ-

ees will be treated under a new administration.

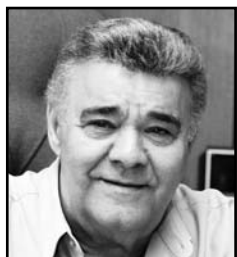
Throughout this year the SIU will provide information about the presidential candidates' ideas for civil service employees throughout the federal government. Check the News section of the SIU website for occasional updates.

## President's Column

### Safety, Solidarity and Your Support

In February, I had a chance to greet CIVMARS working for MSC. These federal mariners attended the annual Maritime Trades Department (MTD) meetings, held this year in San Diego, California. CIVMARS also had an opportunity to meet SIU Government Services Vice President Kermet Mangram and Assistant Vice President Chet Wheeler, who organized their visit.

You may be unfamiliar with the MTD organization and how it operates – but you should know about this group and how it impacts working people like you. The MTD is a department originally established through the Constitution of the AFL-CIO. It has a long history, going back to 1946. The MTD has several functions but its primary role is to give workers employed in the maritime industry and its allied trades a voice in shaping national policy.



Michael Sacco

Who are some of the more than 20 unions that belong to the MTD, other than SIU? The International Union of Operating Engineers, the Boilermakers, the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of Plumbing and Pipefitting, and the American Association of State, County and Federal Employees to name a few. These unions and others all share in the work of this department, as do the numerous MTD port councils across the U.S. and Canada. Collectively, MTD-affiliated organizations represent five million union members, which gives us a greatly amplified voice on Capitol Hill and wherever else we promote the U.S. Merchant Marine.

In the course of its history the MTD has backed some of the most significant pieces of legislation in support of the maritime industry – legislation such as the Cargo Preference Act of 1954, the Merchant Marine Act of 1970 and the Maritime Security Act of 1996, all of which have helped keep the maritime industry strong and relevant to this day.

One of the most important issues to any working person and his or her family is to ensure that a mariner who works on seagoing or coastal vessel, dredge or launch will be safe and return home after a long voyage or a day on the deck plates. If you have been able to keep up with the *Seafarers LOG* over the past few months, you see we have devoted extensive coverage to the sinking of the *El Faro*. I am so proud of the *Apache* crew (see page 3) who took part in the search for the *El Faro* and played a crucial role in finding the vessel. I can tell you that finding the *El Faro* and learning more about what happened meant a great deal to the families of the crew who perished, as it did to our union members, officials and staff.

Nothing about going to sea or working on vessels – big or small – is easy. As AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka noted in his MTD speech, the 33 crew members who died in a violent storm will be remembered on the national Workers Memorial Day 2016. When the *El Faro* went missing I went to Florida, along with other SIU executive officials to meet with the families impacted by this tragedy. The union worked very hard to support each survivor, establish better channels of communication, and begin fund raising drives to help the families.

The SIU heard from American and international maritime organizations, companies and government representatives along with mariners from around the world in a show of extraordinary solidarity for the families of the *El Faro* crew and for the union.

Safety, first and foremost, has always been the top priority for the SIU. When a ship runs into trouble, it's the crew, the vessel's first responders, who stand in solidarity to protect each other. Very few industries have employees who live and work together and support each other as mariners do. That is why the SIU fights so hard to ensure that mariners receive the best safety training possible, and it's why we constantly strive to negotiate and influence best practices and procedures to support shipboard safety.

The SIU has become one of the most influential maritime unions through the support of the people we represent. We need your support to continue to protect you and your families. You can support SIU in many ways. Join us by filling out an 1187 and becoming an active member. Keep us informed about the safety conditions on your vessel. Contact your union representative if you are asked to do something you believe is unsafe. Demonstrate your solidarity by holding union meetings wherever your vessel is located.

We will remain stronger and safer if we always stand together.

### SIU Directory

Michael Sacco, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

David Heindel, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Kermet Mangram,  
*Vice President Government Services*

Chester Wheeler,  
*Asst. Vice President Government Services*

## Commanding Officer of USTRANSCOM Strongly Supports U.S. Merchant Marine

The head of the U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) left no doubt that he believes America must maintain a strong U.S. Merchant Marine.

Gen. Darren W. McDew wrote an op-ed earlier this year that first was published in *The Virginian-Pilot* newspaper and shortly thereafter was picked up by various websites. McDew is in charge of the agency that oversees global transportation for the Defense Department.

Headlined "Losing Our Sea Legs," the general's article begins with an admiring recap of the U.S. airlift and sealift efforts during the Persian Gulf War (the latter an undertaking greatly aided by CIVMARS sailing on MSC vessels). McDew said the mobilization "represented the ultimate show of national resolve in the face of aggression."

He continued, "We all remember the news clips showing helicopters rolling off massive airplanes, but as a career Air Force officer, I must tell you the reality is almost 95 percent of all cargo went by ship. The mere five percent moved by air required near full mobilization of commercial industry and maxed out our military airlift fleets. Indeed, sealift transported more than 2.1 million tons of cargo, which included everything from 2,000 main battle tanks to millions of Meals Ready to Eat."

While acknowledging that many people deserve recognition for U.S. success in that war, McDew wrote that the favorable outcome "was due in large part to the 10,000 U.S. mariners who sped 220 shiploads of decisive U.S. combat power throughout the buildup known as Operation Desert Shield. Without those mariners and vessels, our ability to project decisive force and demonstrate our national resolve would have been a mere fraction of what was required to ensure the swift victory the world witnessed. Simply put, moving an army of decisive size and power can only be accomplished by sea."

But the general's op-ed wasn't merely a history lesson. In fact, one of his main points was that the U.S. may not currently be able to duplicate its sealift performance from the Persian Gulf War – a development he described as shocking and unacceptable.

"As a country, we have collectively worked to maintain a strong maritime industry that supports our needs," McDew observed. "From enacting the Cargo Preference Acts of 1904 and 1954 to the Jones Act of 1920, and from a 1989 National Security Directive to the Maritime Security Act of 1996, we have sought to delay the day when U.S. national security interests could no longer be supported by a U.S. mariner base springing from our ... sealift industry."

"In the 1950s, there were more than 1,000 U.S. ships engaged in international trade," he continued. "Each of these vessels employed and trained a pool



Gen. Darren W. McDew

of U.S. mariners we could rely on in a time of war to sail our forces to the fight. Today, there are only 78."

Predictably, he said, there has been a corresponding decline in the number of American civilian mariners. This puts the nation at risk, the general stated, because "the mariners who move international trade and those who transport wartime cargo come from the same dwindling pool of U.S. mariners. If that U.S. mariner base gets too small, we will have to rely on other countries to deploy our combat power."

After describing some of the current unrest around the globe, McDew wrote, "As a military professional and senior leader, I think about and plan for what the future may hold, and I would tell you we must prepare for the real possibility we will not enjoy the uncontested seas and broad international support experienced in 1991. If either of those possibilities becomes reality, and if we remain committed to responding to security incidents around the globe, the only way of guaranteeing we decisively meet our national objectives is with U.S. ships operated by U.S. mariners."

The full article is widely available online.

*Editor's note: MSC reports through three separate chains of command, one of which is USTRANSCOM for defense transportation matters. USTRANSCOM provides coordination of air, land and sea transportation for the Department of Defense.*

**Infamous Last Words: "We get the same wages and benefits, no way will I pay union dues!"**



# CIVMAR-Crewed USNS Apache Locates El Faro Wreckage; NTSB to Launch 2nd Search for Voyage Data Recorder

Following the tragic sinking of the *M/V El Faro* on Oct. 1 during Hurricane Joaquin, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) a few months later released images and footage of the ship's final resting place. All 33 individuals aboard the *El Faro* perished. They included 17 SIU members, 11 shipmates from the Seafarers-affiliated American Maritime Officers, and five Polish nationals.

The 790-foot ship was located in about 15,000 feet of water on Oct. 31, near Crooked Island in the Bahamas. The salvage team, working aboard the CIVMAR crewed *USNS Apache*, documented the wreckage and searched for the voyage data recorder (VDR), sometimes referred to as the black box.

Because the debris field was so deep a traditional submarine could not be used. A remotely operated vehicle (ROV), the CURV-21, equipped with high-definition cameras, was sent from the *Apache*. The ROV used high-definition cameras to survey the ship's hull. Robotic arms are used to cut cables and maneuver the vehicle. Though the VDR has not been recovered, the video and photos taken by the CURV-21 illustrated the power of a hurricane. The striking images show the wheelhouse was sheared off from the rest of the wreckage.

Tom Roth-Roffy, lead investigator with the NTSB, described the images of the wreck in an episode of *60 Minutes*. While pointing at a photo of the wheelhouse, Roth-Roffy said, "There should be two decks above that: the lower navigation bridge and the bridge deck... Just to see the violence of the sea and the winds that would have had to occur to cause that kind of an event...."



The *USNS Apache* (left) located and confirmed the identity of the wreck. In photo at right, shipboard personnel prepare search vehicles for deployment. (U.S. Navy photos)

The full set of wreckage photos, as well as the video, can be found on [www.seafarers.org](http://www.seafarers.org) in a Jan. 4 post in the News section.

After the search was completed, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Florida) wrote a letter to Christopher Hart, chairman of the NTSB, and urged him to consider another search for the missing VDR.

"It is critical that we determine the cause of the *El Faro* sinking to prevent tragedies like this from happening again," wrote Nelson. "While I have faith in your ability to complete this investigation with the informa-

tion you have gathered, it is important to ensure the most complete investigation possible."

The NTSB announced Feb. 11 that it would launch a second expedition to search for evidence. According to the NTSB announcement, "A key objective of the upcoming mission, which is expected to begin in April and last about two weeks, is to locate the voyage data recorder (VDR) and to provide investigators with a more extensive and detailed survey of the shipwreck. The exact launch date will be announced later."

## Newest MSC Fleet Replenishment Oiler to be Named USNS John Lewis

The next generation of Navy fleet replenishment oilers is a few years from starting construction, but the first vessel has been named. The future oiler, which will be crewed by SIU Government Services Division mariners working in the Military Sealift Command (MSC) fleet, will be the *USNS John Lewis* (T-AO 205).

The *John Lewis* is named after current U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Georgia), who was honored earlier this year at a vessel-naming ceremony conducted at the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus made the announcement, and shared his thoughts on the future vessel.

"As the first of its class, the future *USNS John Lewis* will play a vital role in the mission of our Navy and Marine Corps while also forging a new path in fleet replenishment," said Mabus. "Naming this ship after John Lewis is a fitting tribute to a man who has, from his youth, been at the forefront of progressive social and human rights movements in the U.S., directly shaping both the past and future of our nation."

Lewis is a civil rights movement icon who participated in the "Freedom Rides" of 1961. He was a keynote speaker at the March on Washington in 1963, and led 600 protestors across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Lewis was elected as U.S. representative of Georgia's Fifth Congressional District in 1986, and has dedicated his life to protecting human rights,



Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus (left) greets Rep. John Lewis (D-Georgia) before the ceremony for the future fleet replenishment oiler *USNS John Lewis* (T-AO 205). (U.S. Navy photo)

securing civil liberties, and building what he calls "the beloved community" in America.

The new ship "will, for decades to come, serve as a visible symbol of the freedoms Representative Lewis holds dear, and his example will live on in the steel of that ship and in all those who will serve aboard her," said Mabus.

The vessel will provide underway replenishment of fuel and stores to U.S. Navy ships at sea. A building contract will be awarded for the ship in summer 2016 and construction is expected to begin in 2018.

### Rare Life Insurance Open Season for All Federal Mariners Last from Sept. 1-Sept. 30

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has announced that in a rare open season, federal employees will be allowed to increase their life insurance without taking a physical examination or having a qualifying life event. The last two Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) open seasons were in 1999 and 2004, respectively.

Look for more information about this benefit and how to increase it during the upcoming open season in the next issue of *The Federal Mariner*. If you have immediate questions about the FEGLI program or the status of your current life insurance policy with FEGLI you can call your Human Resources office or visit the OPM website: [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)

### Submissions Wanted

Attention all ACOE, NOAA, SBRF-MARAD and MSC federal mariners: Your work on behalf of our government is vital. Your union appreciates all you do in your workplace and on behalf of our nation.

We want your voices to be heard! We want to make sure we are writing about issues and topics that are of importance to all our Government Services units. Please send your comments, pictures and requests for coverage to [siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org)

We will do our best to print your photos and publish articles based on your requests.

Be active. Stay involved. Support the *Federal Mariner* and your union!

**For contact with SIU:**

[siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org)

**Find us on Facebook:**

Click on icon at [www.seafarers.org](http://www.seafarers.org)

**Find us on Twitter:**

[www.twitter.com/seafarersunion](http://www.twitter.com/seafarersunion)

### How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy. The union's website – [www.seafarers.org](http://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/civmar.asp](http://www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp)

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

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## SIU CIVMARS Attend Maritime Trades Department Executive Board Meeting



Rank-and-file Seafarers attended the two-day MTD gathering Feb. 18-19 in San Diego, as did representatives from virtually every segment of the maritime industry. Many of the SIU members are pictured above, with SIU officials.

## Trumka Credits MTD, Voices Optimism for Promoting Workers' Rights

This year's Maritime Trades Department (MTD) executive board meeting took place in San Diego. Some Military Sealift Command (MSC) CIVMARS from the Naval Base San Diego attended the proceedings, where SIU President Michael Sacco, who also holds the position of MTD president, led the meetings.

The two-day gathering (Feb. 18-19) was packed with guest speakers and other stakeholders who came to address many different union representatives, vessel operators and guests. The MTD, a constitutional department of the AFL-CIO, includes 21 affiliated unions with a combined membership of more than five million.

Kicking off the second day of the meetings,

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka energized the crowd. Trumka began by thanking President Sacco for his contributions to the labor movement: "You're a great friend, a great leader, and I just want to say thanks for what you do for working people every single day."

Trumka then thanked the board and guests for demonstrating the power of cooperation in the labor movement. He also took a moment to say a few words about the departed brothers and sisters who worked aboard the *El Faro*.

"The deaths of these 33 brave women and men – 28 members of the Seafarers and the American Maritime Officers and five Polish nationals – reminds us of the perilous nature of navigating the world's oceans," Trumka stated. "Soon, on April 28, in recognition of Workers Memorial Day, we'll remember the crew of *El Faro*, and those who died on the job, or from diseases and injuries after a lifetime of work."

"Remembering is important, but we also have to do everything in our power to improve workplace safety," he continued, "because as Mother Jones once said, 'Mourn the dead, and then fight like hell for the living.'"



AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, a longtime friend of the SIU, addresses the executive board.

And right now, brothers and sisters, there's nothing more important than sticking together and fighting like hell for our members and workers out there every single day, because we're under attack."

That fight was the main topic of Trumka's speech, as he detailed the current state of workers' rights. He described the grassroots movement to improve worker protections, protect wages and ensure a safe place to work. He called on individual unions to lead by example.

As for a way to fight back, the answer is right in front of us, said Trumka: "We have to stand together. Benjamin Franklin said the rule of solidarity is pretty simple: Either we hang together, or assuredly we will all hang separately.... It's about basic dignity and basic fairness, about policies that lift us all up, together."

That theme of solidarity continued as he began to talk about the maritime community, saying, "That's why we

support the Maritime Security Program and the Jones Act, which impacts private sector maritime vessels. It ensures that every vessel travelling between U.S. ports is built, and owned, and crewed by Americans. The Jones Act is key for American security and, quite frankly, for the American economy."

After briefly touching on the AFL-CIO's decision to refrain from nominating a presidential candidate until after the primaries, he emphasized how critical the upcoming election will be for the working class, and not just in the presidential race, but at every level of government. With the recent death of Antonin Scalia, there is also a new opening on the Supreme Court, to which Trumka responded, "America has a chance for a new mainstream majority on our nation's highest court, which would mean hope for responsible rulings on a raft of cases."

The AFL-CIO, much like the SIU, is a bipartisan organization, with allies on both sides of the aisle. As Trumka described, "The AFL-CIO is not a tool of any political party, or any politician. We're a federation built entirely on working people, and our only fidelity is to our members and the working families across America."

He concluded, "So Mike (Sacco), as always, the Maritime Trades will lead the way. You know about service, you embody sacrifice, you practice solidarity.... Brothers and sisters, I want to tell you one more time how proud I am to be here with you, because you know how to win for America's hard-working families. You've done it many, many times. And you'll keep doing it, and I know you will. When we stand together, we win together.... America remains the wealthiest nation in world history, at our wealthiest time in history. We can support middle-class jobs and succeed. That's what America is all about."

## Fischer: U.S. Military Veterans Deserve More than Lip Service Council Head: Attacks on Workers are Attacks on Those Who Served

The head of the AFL-CIO Union Veterans Council delivered his message with great passion, but he said the organization's vital mission is actually very basic: improving the lives of veterans and working people, who are one and the same.

Will Fischer, the council's executive director, addressed the Maritime Trades Department (MTD) executive board Feb. 19 in San Diego. The MTD is a constitutional department of the AFL-CIO, and its 21 affiliates (including the SIU) represent approximately five million union members. SIU President Michael Sacco also serves as MTD president.

Fischer a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran, fired up the crowd and drew several standing ovations.

Fischer began by asking all military veterans in the audience of 200 or so to stand, then requested a show of hands from everyone whose family included a veteran. The point immediately became clear: Nearly everyone at the meeting either had worn the uniform or had a family member who served.

"The working class and the veteran class are one," Fischer stated. "When you're talking to an audience of people who work, you're talking to an audience of people who served. When you see folks fighting for and defending our rights on the job here at home, very often those same folks already tasted battle and fought to defend our rights overseas."

With that in mind, the Union Veterans Council aims "to show that the issues facing veterans and those facing the working class aren't independent of each other," Fischer continued. "Our mission is to mobilize so that



Will Fischer tells the MTD audience that grassroots political action is vital for American workers.

when someone takes off their uniform that they have access to a good job; to advocate so that when someone takes off their uniform that they are able to access the health care we earned – health care delivered through a strong, fully funded and staffed VA."

Not to be overlooked is the council's additional goal of organizing "so that when someone takes off their uniform and goes to work that they're carrying with them basic dignity and respect and the ability to collectively bargain for a fair reward for the job they do," Fischer stated.

While those aims all seem plainly unobjectionable, Fischer said political support for veterans often amounts to nothing more than lip service. Drawing in the audience even further with a quick series of questions, he as-

serted that it's anything but "pro-veteran" to undermine the Jones Act, support bad trade deals that kill American jobs, and take credit for hiring veterans but then pay them standard wages.

"And yet these are the actions that are taken by some of those who claim so loudly to be pro-veteran," Fischer said. "The same folks who sent me and many of you to every corner of the world to protect and fight for our nation's future, and now that they're finished with us they do whatever they can to prevent us from having a future of our own. He then delved into the council's ongoing efforts to help ensure smooth proceedings at the Veterans Administration.

Fischer also reminded everyone about the importance of grassroots political action.

"We have a unique opportunity to shape the way we – and others – talk about the trade union movement, our legislative battles, and politics," he declared. "When you go on a congressional visit, if you're talking to a politician, if you're organizing a new worker.... After this conference, when you go back home, let folks know about the Union Veterans Council and encourage them to sign up to push our movement forward."

"The movement that's successful is the movement that hasn't forgotten its mission," he continued. "To the veterans: We're veterans because we answered the call and fought to protect our nation's future. We must organize to fight a new war – a war for our voice and for our dignity and for our future."

To join the Union Veterans Council and for more information, visit <http://unionveterans.org/>