The SIU and a dozen other labor organizations, all members of the Federal Workers Alliance (FWA), have sued the Trump administration for violating the rights of government workers and their unions throughout the federal government. Three executive or- ders were issued on Friday, May 25 in the late afternoon right before the start of Memorial Day weekend. The unions’ lawsuit was filed June 13 in the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia.

The FWA represents approximately 300,000 federal workers in hundreds of occupa- tions ranging from mariners, teachers in Depart- ment of Defense schools, welders at Navy yards, firefighters, NASA rocket scien- tists, nurses, and Immigration judges.

“This is a democracy and not a monarchy with a king who can unilaterally eliminate the rights of Congress and federal workers,” said Paul Shearon, who serves as secretary-trea- surer of the International Federation of Pro- fessional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE).

The unions contend the executive orders violate the due process and collective bar- gaining rights of workers employed by the federal government.

“Donald Trump did not have the authority to issue these executive orders because the power to do so was not granted to him by either Congress or by the Constitution,” said Sarah Siniczky, National Association of Government Employees and FWA Co-chair.

The unions’ lawsuit specifically addresses:

■ Several sections of Executive Order 13836 (concerning time spent representing workers by union representatives) usurp Congress’s legislative authority. The same executive order prohibits representatives from using official time to “prepare or pur- chase grievances (including arbitration of grievances) brought against an agency,” but allows it for employees working on their own behalf. Treating a union and its representa- tives differently from individual employees encroaches on a union’s right to take collec- tive action.

■ Executive Order 13837 (concerning due process rights) violates rules related to collective bargaining delegated to the Federal Labor Relations Authority, not the President.

■ The executive order illegally limits how much time employee representatives are able to use to help their fellow unit employees, will not allow payment for union represen- tatives who may need to travel to represent employees in their units, will charge unions to use office space and equipment which the Federal Labor Relations Authority has ruled “nonnegotiable” between a union and agency and will make union representatives take per- sonal leave time to help process grievances, and will make unionized employees give up certain rights.

■ Executive Order 13839 (concerning misconduct) is an attempt to exclude mat- ters from the negotiated grievance procedure, such as removals based on misconduct and
cannot be furloughed, the SIU expressed its opposition to the executive orders.

The union filed a suit citing violations of the First Amendment. The government is expected to respond.

The 13 labor organizations that are party to the FWA lawsuit are: Federal Education Association-National Education Association (FEA/NEA); Interna- tional Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW); International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT); Interna- tional Federation of Professional and Tech- nical Engineers, AFL-CIO (IFPTE); Marine Engineers’ Beneficial Association, AFL- CIO (MEBA); Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO (MTD); National Association of Government Employees, SEIU (NAGE); National Federation of Federal Employees, IAMAW, AFL-CIO (NFFE); National Labor Relations Board Professional Association (NLRBPA); National Labor Relations Board Union (NLRBU); National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO); Patent Office Professional Association (POPAA), and Seafarers International Union of North America, AFL-CIO (SIU).

House Democrats Blast Executive Orders as ‘Unprecedented Attack’

Editor’s note: The following article was published June 14 as a news release on the website of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE). Head- quartered in Washington, D.C., the union represents some 700,000 federal and fed- eral agencies.

Opposition to the illegal and constitu- tional executive orders President Trump issued last month targeting federal workers continues to grow. After 21 House Republicans told President Trump that the directives “undermine existing labor laws,” 23 House Democrats — all ranking members of House committees, including House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi — filed their own letter to President Trump today asking that he rescind the orders as they “constitute an unprecedented attack on good governance and a professional, non- partisan civil service.”

American Federation of Government Employees National President J. David Cox Sr. released the following statement:

“The 13 labor organizations that are party to the FWA lawsuit are: Federal Education Association-National Education Association (FEA/NEA); Interna- tional Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW); International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT); Interna- tional Federation of Professional and Tech- nical Engineers, AFL-CIO (IFPTE); Marine Engineers’ Beneficial Association, AFL- CIO (MEBA); Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO (MTD); National Association of Government Employees, SEIU (NAGE); National Federation of Federal Employees, IAMAW, AFL-CIO (NFFE); National Labor Relations Board Professional Association (NLRBPA); National Labor Relations Board Union (NLRBU); National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO); Patent Office Professional Association (POPAA), and Seafarers International Union of North America, AFL-CIO (SIU).

“Politicians seem to agree on very little these days, so it is quite remarkable that both Republicans and Democrats are speaking out against such a public anti-condemnation of the executive orders without fear of reprisal.

“Executive orders strip agencies of their right to bargain terms and condi- tions of employment and replace it with a politically charged scheme to fire employ- ees without due process. Left unaddressed, these directives will deprive 2 million workers of their rights to address and re- solve workplace issues such as sexual ha- rassment, racial discrimination, retaliation against whistleblowers, improving work- place health and safety, enforcing reason- able accommodations for workers with disabilities, and so much more.

“Thank you to Congresswoman Eliot Langel Cummings for spearheading the Demo- cratic letter, and thank you to all of the lawmakers from both sides of the aisle who are speaking out not just for federal employees but for our democracy.”

Mt. Whitney CIVMARS Receive Habitability Compensation

United Action, Strong Advocacy for CIVMARS’ Health and Safety Grievance

A recent cash settlement was negotiated for unclassified CIVMARS subjected to hazardous and difficult living and working conditions aboard the USS Mt. Whitney.

Together, the SIU and unclassified CIVMARS serving aboard the Mt. Whitney during its 2017 Croatian maintenance period addressed numerous health and safety concerns lasting more than three months. CIVMARS, required to move aboard the vessel too soon, experienced exposure to fumes, heat, noise, problems with water quality, ventilation and accumulated dust and grime throughout the vessel. The conditions also impacted galley operations.

Several crew members contacted the SIU upon moving back onto the vessel. The union prepared complaints for the cases. Many of the crew signed the grievance and it was processed under the SIU’s collective bargaining agreement. The crew sent details about the conditions as

The maritime union filed a suit against the Military Sealift Command (MSC) for violating the rights of CIVMARS for looking out for each other, for work- ing closely with their union, for signing the grievance and getting it through the correct process — that led to this good news.”

Are you seeing health and safety problems on your vessel? Contact the SIU at: siufedmariner@seafarers.org or contact your union representative.

The SIU is proud of the CIVMARS for working out for each other, for work- ing closely with their union, for signing the grievance and getting it through the correct process — that led to this good news.”

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Unions More Necessary than Ever

It’s been a busy time for the SIU and federal mariners, too, as the stories in this edition demonstrate. We are proud of the work all our federal mariners do in NOAA, ACOE, MARAD - Suisun Bay and MSC. Sometimes it’s a dramatic action, like the work of the CIVMAR crew aboard the USNS Trenton when they rescued 41 people in the Mediterranean (story on page 3). Sometimes it’s efforts mariners take on behalf of themselves and their shipmates, like the Mt. Whitney CIVMARs who worked with NAU representatives to correct health and safety problems during a yard period (story on page 1). And these stories are part of a much bigger picture. While there’s plenty of reason for optimism about the future of organized labor, there are also some undeniable challenges faced by not only the union movement but by all workers across the country, most definitely including our federal-sector mariners. These are tough times for America’s working families, and that’s mostly due to an accumulation of decades’ worth of governmental policies that favor the rich and encourage the export of U.S. jobs. It’s also due to prolonged attacks on unions – attacks which are designed to weaken the security of workers in every profession.

When working people have the freedom to speak up together through unions, progress is made that benefits all Americans. We saw the power collective action gives working people most recently in West Virginia, where tens of thousands of teachers stood their ground to win changes for themselves and their students and their communities. In addition to West Virginia, teachers and their supporters in Oklahoma, Arizona and Kentucky also came together to work towards achieving a better standard of living and promoting a better educational environment for their students. And we know why your union and other unions representing federal workers teamed up to protest the issuance of executive orders directing agencies across the federal government to take away so many established workplace rights (see story on page 1). Despite the continual efforts to undermine the rights of working people and the unions which represent them, union membership in America grew last year. Non-partisan polling shows that more people in the U.S. have a favorable view of unions today than they have in many, many years. Brothers and sisters, that data reflects an opportunity to grow our movement and to increase our collective effectiveness for promoting and protecting workers’ rights.

Revitalizing the labor movement will take time. Protecting your workplace rights is a first step. How can you make a difference? How can you protect yourself and your family in the event a problem at work occurs? Start by joining the SIU and showing your solidarity. The SIU can help you with safety and health problems during a health and safety audit and with other important ways.

You can also start by calling on your state, local and federal lawmakers to step up to the plate and join us on the cause. We must demand that our representatives do everything in their power to protect and strengthen the freedom of American workers by making it easier for working people to join together in unions.

Don’t be fooled, brothers and sisters: Labor unions are now more critical to America’s success than ever before. You don’t have to be a union member to know that freedom is not given, but must be bought. With that in mind, I again encourage all of you to invite your elected officials to stand with us to make the fight to protect our freedoms easier, more critical to America’s success than ever before. You don’t have to be a union member to know that freedom is not given, but must be bought. With that in mind, I again encourage all of you to invite your elected officials to stand with us to make the fight to protect our freedoms easier.

Register and Vote

And speaking of elected officials, it’s almost election time again. In November, the entire U.S. House of Representatives will be up for election along with 35 U.S. Senate seats and 39 state and territorial gubernatorships. Many other state and local elections also will take place. With that in mind, it’s definitely not too soon to make sure you’re registered to vote. Just go online to Vote.org and take it from there. The site is run by a non-profit organization and it’s very user-friendly.

Secretary of Defense Backs Mariners

U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis recently offered strong words of support for the U.S. Merchant Marine.

Speaking June 16 to new graduates of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Mattis said, “You’re going to be the fourth arm of the defense. You’re going to sustain our alliances and fuel our military and ferry our warriors.”

During his remarks in Kings Point, New York, the secretary stated, “As small as our merchant marine may be today, it is absolutely essential. We’re going to need you as we see the storm clouds gather elsewhere as our diplomats are in a position where we have to buy time for them to solve problems.”

Mattis told the gathering of nearly 4,500 people that his father had been a merchant mariner during World War II. He relayed a 1935 quote from the leader who guided America’s effort during that war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, recalling his time as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War II. “In the event of a war, American-flag ships are obviously needed not only for Naval auxiliary, but also for the maintenance of reasonable and necessary commercial intercourse. We should remember the lessons learned in the last war.”

Mattis reminded the graduates and audience, “Those lessons that he was speaking to are timeless, and I would tell you the essential nature of that and that is what we still need today.”

Board Salutes Sacco’s Visionary Leadership

Following the announced awards at the annual Greater New York/New Jersey Maritime Port Council Dinner - Dance on June 9, the SIU Executive Board took over the stage to make a special presentation. That is, all the board members except one.

Executive Vice President Augie Tellez told the more than 300 in the audience that the union was celebrating several milestones, including the 80th anniversary of the Seafarers International Union of North America.

“For the last 30 years, we have had an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity,” Tellez stated. “We have enjoyed a piece of the American Dream. This comes as no accident. This is the 30th anniversary of our leader – Mike Sacco (in office). His vision and his tremendous drive motivate us to do what we do.”

Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel followed Tellez at the microphone to recognize and thank Sacco’s wife, Sophie, before using one of President Sacco’s favorite analogies: “Mike has referred to us (the Executive Board) as his Super Bowl team. On behalf of the Board, we would like to present our coach with his own Super Bowl trophy.”

The unexpected tribute with a standing ovation caught Sacco completely by surprise. As he accepted the lookalike trophy, Sacco said it has been “a wonderful 30 years. Coaches don’t win games; players win games. These are the players. These are the guys who get it done.”

Sacco acknowledged the many industry officials attending the dinner by reminding all that labor and business have worked and will continue to work together in order to succeed. “We want a fair shake. We don’t want more, we don’t want less. We will help you.”

Did you miss a back issue of The Federal Mariner?

PDF copies of every edition are available at www.seafarers.org

Look under the News menu, then click “CIVMAR News”

Michael Sacco, President
Augustine 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

Secretary of Defense James Mattis

U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis

Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel
CIVMAR-Crewed USNS Trenton Rescues 41 in Mediterranean

SIU CIVMARS recently assisted in a dramatic rescue at sea.

On June 12, the CIVMAR-crewed USNS Trenton rendered assistance to people in distress that it encountered while conducting routine operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Two rigid-hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) and one fast rescue boat were launched from the Trenton; 41 people were recovered. The distressed people, whose own vessel sank, were immediately brought aboard the Trenton and provided with food, water, clothing and medical care.

In a news release about the rescue, the Navy noted, “This demonstrates the multi-mission capability of U.S. Naval forces and our ability to respond rapidly to provide relief.”

During the operation, the Trenton crew initially observed approximately 12 bodies in the water that appeared to be unresponsive. The crew prioritized recovering those who needed immediate help.

Five days later, the Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transport ship transferred the 41 people to ships from the Italian Coast Guard off the coast of the island of Lampedusa, Italy.

“Although it is seldom that we run into people in distress at sea, it is something we plan, practice and prepare for routinely,” said Susan Orsini, the ship’s captain aboard the Trenton. “A rescue at sea involves all hands aboard the ship. I was so proud and impressed by the thoughtful resourcefulness of all hands on board USNS Trenton; it filled my heart with hope and gratitude.”

She added, “The pivotal role the shore side units and personnel play in a rescue at sea cannot be minimized; the ship cannot do it alone. Their efforts involve intense and intricate coordination, timely and critical communications to all units and personnel involved. The reward for our efforts was seeing the rescued personnel transferred, in good spirits and good health, heading to their next destination.”

How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy and an important step in protecting your workplace rights. 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/civmar.asp

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

Contact Information

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

Government Services Fleet Representative
Sam Spain:
Phone: (757) 622-1892
Email: sspain@seafarers.org

Free College

The Union Plus Free College Benefit offers working families an accessible, debt-free and convenient higher education opportunity. You, your spouse, children, financial dependents and grandchildren, can all take advantage of this exciting opportunity.

Find out more about this and other great Union Plus programs by visiting unionplus.org.

1-888-590-9009 unionplusfreecollege.org

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The Seafarers-crewed USNS Trenton
TSP Posts Updates on Eventual Changes for Withdrawal Options

For federal mariners working at ACOE, Suisun Bay Reserve — MARAD, NOAA and MSC who are nearing retirement, the information below can help you understand some new retirement rules coming in 2019.

The office of the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) has posted comprehensive information about eventual changes to its withdrawal options stemming from passage of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Modernization Act late last year.

According to the office as well as news reports, those changes aren’t imminent, mainly because they take time to travel through various forms, publications, the TSP website and much more. According to an official with the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board (which oversees the TSP), the law allows the office two years to finalize its changes. The upshot is that “everything will be done by November 2019,” the official said.

Excerpts from a related fact sheet posted by the TSP are printed here. The online fact sheet is a three-page (as of late May) PDF file that the office is updating from time to time. It can be accessed directly at the following web address:


What’s going to change?

When the new withdrawal policies go into effect, you will have more options for how and when you can access money from your TSP account. These options fall into the following categories:

• Multiple age-based (for those 59½ or older) in-service and separation-post partial withdrawals will be allowed to various forms, publications, the TSP website and much more. According to an official with the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board (which oversees the TSP), the law allows the office two years to finalize its changes. The upshot is that “everything will be done by November 2019,” the official said.

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Withdrawing Withdrawal

By law, the TSP currently requires that you make a full withdrawal election after you turn 70½ and have separated from federal service. If you fail to do that, we initiate an account “abandonment” process. The new law does away with this requirement. You will never be required to make a full withdrawal election.

You will still need to receive IRS-required minimum distributions (RMDs). You can satisfy the requirement by taking a partial withdrawal or installment payments. If you don’t take any action or just don’t withdraw enough to meet your RMD, we will automatically send you the remaining RMD amount.

If your account has already been abandoned, you’ll be able to restore the account without making a full withdrawal election. Your restored balance can remain in the plan (subject to RMDs) with all the new withdrawal options available.

If the law has been passed, why are the new options not yet available, and why could they take so long to implement?

It might seem like a simple thing to start allowing something that’s currently not allowed, but there’s a lot to be done to make these changes happen. There are substantial programming changes and form revisions to be made just to make it possible for participants to take advantage of the new options. And there are many publications and web pages that will need to be changed to reflect our new policy and new procedures. By the way, in addition to the changes mandated by new law, we’re also adding the ability to specify how much of your withdrawal should be Roth and how much should be traditional; withdrawals currently come out pro rata from both sources.

Also, as a government agency, we have to publish any policy changes that are necessary to implement new legislation in publicly accessible regulations. So we have to publish new regulations in order to allow the new options. We also have to have a public comment period and take the time to consider comments before we make final regulatory changes.

We asked Congress for these new withdrawal options, so rest assured that we’re motivated to enact them as soon as possible. We intend to have these changes in place before the two-year deadline but don’t yet have a specific date to announce.

Why didn’t you start working on this before the new law was passed?

We did. But it would have been inefficient to spend the substantial resources necessary for this project before they were actually needed. The new law mandated that we make this change.

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