



# THE FEDERAL MARINER

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Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer addresses service members and civilians at MSC's change of command ceremony aboard the CIVMAR-crewed *USNS Burlington* (T-EPF 10). (U.S. Navy photo by Jennifer Hunt)



Arriving early for the ceremony are (from left) SIU Govt. Services Rep. Sam Spain, SIU VP Govt. Services Kate Hunt, MM&P Rep. Randi Ciszewski and MEBA Branch Agent/ Govt. Fleet Rep. Tracy Burke.

## SIU Well-Represented as MSC Conducts Change of Command Ceremony in Virginia

The U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command (MSC) has a new commanding officer.

Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer relieved Rear Adm. Dee Mewbourne as MSC commander during a June 28 ceremony aboard the SIU CIVMAR-crewed expeditionary fast transport ship *USNS Burlington* at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

SIU Vice President Government Services Kate Hunt and Representative Sam Spain attended the ceremony. They noted that Mewbourne, during his official remarks, thanked SIU President Michael Sacco, Executive Vice President Augie Tellez and Hunt for their work in helping provide crews for MSC ships while strengthening the overall U.S. Merchant

Marine and reinforcing its readiness to answer the call.

Adm. Christopher W. Grady, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, and Lt. Gen. John J. Broadmeadow, deputy commander, U.S. Transportation Command, were the guest speakers.

Mewbourne, a native of Ormond Beach, Florida, assumed command of MSC Aug. 25, 2016, overseeing the on-time logistics, strategic sealift and specialized missions that MSC conducts around the world, many of them utilizing SIU-crewed vessels.

The agency noted, "During his tenure, Mewbourne, and his staff devoted significant effort in developing and executing a plan to adapt to the changing operational environment and keep MSC ahead of competitors and potential adversaries."

A graduate of the Colorado State University and native of Alexandria, Virginia, Wettlaufer assumed command of MSC following his latest tour of duty as the commander of Carrier Strike Group 3 in Bremerton, Washington.

"I am truly humbled to be here and to join this fantastic team," said Wettlaufer. "Just coming off a dynamic, around-the-world (U.S. Navy) strike group deployment, my team was a prodigious consumer and demanding customer of logistics systems around the globe. As such, I understand and appreciate the challenges which MSC overcomes every day in order to provide the systems and synchronize global activities needed to deliver, distribute and sustain our warriors forward."

Wettlaufer previously commanded the Dambusters of Strike Fighter Squadron 195, *USS Denver* and *USS John C. Stennis*.

According to MSC, "Wettlaufer's completed sea assignments include multiple deployments to the Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf with Attack Squadron 85 and Carrier Air Wing 1 flying the A-6 Intruder from the *USS America* including Operation Desert Storm. Forward-deployed from Japan aboard *USS Independence* and *USS Kitty Hawk* as a Dambuster department head and CVW-5 operations officer, he flew the FA-18C Hornet and he deployed to the Pacific as executive officer aboard *USS John C. Stennis*."

Mewbourne now will serve as deputy commander of the U.S. Transportation Command.

## USNS Puerto Rico Undergoes Successful Integrated Sea Trials

A civilian-crewed U.S. military support ship recently took a big step towards delivery.

The *USNS Puerto Rico* – which will be crewed by CIVMARS from the SIU Government Services Division – successfully completed the first integrated sea trials for an expeditionary fast transport (EPF) ship Aug. 22. The vessel returned to the Austal USA shipyard in Mobile, Alabama, following two days underway in the Gulf of Mexico.

Integrated trials combine builder's and acceptance trials, allowing for the shipyard to demonstrate to the Navy's Board

of Inspection and Survey the operational capability and mission readiness of all the ship's systems during a single underway period. During trials, the shipbuilder conducted comprehensive tests to demonstrate the performance of the *Puerto Rico*'s major systems.

"The EPF program continues to be an example of stable and successful serial ship production," said Capt. Scot Searles, Navy Strategic and Theater Sealift program manager, Program Executive Office Ships. "I look forward to seeing EPF 11 deliver in the fall and expand the opera-

tional flexibility available to our combatant commanders."

SIU CIVMARS already sail aboard the previously launched EPFs. The Navy describes the ships as "non-combatant vessels designed to operate in shallow-draft ports and waterways, increasing operational flexibility for a wide range of activities including maneuver and sustainment, relief operations in small or damaged ports, flexible logistics support, or as the key enabler for rapid transport. The ships are capable of interfacing with roll-on/roll-off discharge facilities, as well as on/

off-loading vehicles such as a fully combat-loaded Abrams Main Battle Tank."

EPFs support a variety of missions including overseas contingency operations, conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, supporting special operations forces, and supporting emerging joint sea-basing concepts.

In addition to the *Puerto Rico*, Austal USA is also currently in production on the future *USNS Newport*, and is under contract to build the future *USNS Apalachicola* and an additional sister ship that hasn't been named.



## President's Column

### Labor Day

Media coverage of this year's Labor Day often included what I consider a crucial fact. Namely, the general public has a favorable view of organized labor – but people who want to join unions often fight an unfairly uphill battle.



Michael Sacco

AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka, who's been a friend for many years, did a great job throughout a series of interviews explaining why our country is long overdue for extensive labor-law reform. The deck is severely stacked against workers in most traditional organizing campaigns. We've gotten to this point through decades of attacks on unions. Those attacks – sometimes sneaky, sometimes brazen – have taken a toll and have eroded too many protections.

And that's basically why the movement's numbers are where they are. It's a flat-out falsehood that unions aren't needed anymore, or that people aren't interested in joining. Nonpartisan polling shows that people do indeed value what collective bargaining and union representation have to offer. They understand that union representation is the only effective way to have a voice in the workplace. They'd welcome the chance to sign up, and they know that union members consistently earn more money and have better benefits than unrepresented workers. But, too often, employers have all the power during an organizing campaign, and they face few if any penalties for breaking the law.

It's no secret that when unions are strong, the middle class is strong. And America's businesses and workers, from the 1930s to the 1970s, grew together. But since then, companies have gotten more prosperous while workers' pay largely has stayed the same.

We have an opportunity to turn this ship around, and as always, it starts at the ballot box. The 2020 elections, incredibly, are only a year away. There are also elections before the end of this year. Stay informed about the issues and candidates, and support candidates at every level of government who'll support America's working families and the maritime industry. The SIU has never cared about political party and that'll be the case again next year. We'll back those who back us, period.

### Grassroots and Civility

Speaking of politics, I enjoyed recent remarks from the union's legislative director, Brian Schoeneman. Addressing one of our affiliated unions, he declared that the most important thing union members can do to protect your job and help advance the labor movement in the political arena is to vote.

"There is no more powerful four-letter word in the union vocabulary, even when politicians give us reasons to use a lot of other four-letter words," he said, and I agree.

Motivating others to vote is also important, and it's something we can all do. Talk with your co-workers and neighbors about the issues and candidates that matter to you. Encourage them to vote, and if they're not registered, point them in the right direction.

Brian also underscored the vital significance of political action funds, which for the SIU means SPAD. Those funds are a form of insurance and a virtual prerequisite to have a seat at the table and have our voices heard. Our political donations help to get good candidates elected to office and keep good elected officials in office. Any help you can give is critical.

On a personal note, I encourage all Seafarers to keep it civil when discussing politics, no matter who you're talking with. It's often a touchy subject, but our country needs to re-learn the art of civil discourse and focusing on issues rather than personalities.

## SIU Directory

Michael Sacco, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

David Heindel, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Kate Hunt,

*Vice President Government Services*

Joe Vincenzo,

*Asst. Vice President Government Services*

# Union Mourns Loss of Two

Tragedy struck twice earlier this year, as two civilian mariners died in accidents aboard different vessels.

According to published reports, AB **Brian Francis Crowe**, 56, died in late July due to injuries sustained in a "workplace mishap" on the *USNS Cesar Chavez* in the Arabian Sea.

A month earlier, in late June, Boatswain's Mate **Martin Anthony**, 51, died after falling 25 feet while doing maintenance aloft aboard the USNS William McLean. The vessel was in a shipyard in Charleston, South Carolina.

The Military Sealift Command is investigating both fatalities.

In a message to the fleet, SIU Vice President Government Services Kate Hunt said, "We are working with the agency to examine the circumstances. We constantly interact with MSC to improve shipboard safety, even while understanding that our industry carries some inherent dangers. Our job, which we take most seriously, is to help make shipboard life as safe as possible. For now, on behalf of the Seafarers International Union's Government Services Division, I wanted you to be aware of these tragedies. It goes without saying that our hearts go out to the family, friends and shipmates of both Brian and Martin."

## Trumka: Workers Quiz Candidates On Wages, Trade Pacts, U.S. Jobs

Workers are "not interested in a sliver of change or gestures" from politicians, but demand massive shifts to an economy that works for them rather than heavily benefiting the extremely wealthy, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka recently stated. And, primed by their unions, they're already demanding and getting that commitment from presidential candidates on the campaign trail, he added.

Trumka, a longtime friend of the SIU, made those remarks and many others Aug. 29 during an annual pre-Labor Day press breakfast hosted by *The Christian Science Monitor*. He cited several important steps that would help ensure an economy that works for all, including passage of the Protect the Right to Organize (Pro) Act, strong worker safeguards in the U.S., and massive changes in labor laws (and enforcement) in Mexico before any ratification of an updated NAFTA. (The Pro Act, designed to strengthen U.S. labor law, now has more than 200 U.S. House co-sponsors and 41 Senate co-sponsors.)

Additionally, Trumka noted that unions' popularity, at least as measured by an annual Gallup Poll, recently reached a record 64% approval. But that hasn't translated, yet, into increasing union numbers, due to the loopholes and flaws of U.S. labor law.

He sees change coming, though, citing new state-level legislation that will open the way to organizing significant numbers of workers. Trumka also expressed optimism stemming from public-sector union membership gains that happened after last year's Supreme Court *Janus* decision, which some had viewed as a potentially devastating blow to organized labor.

However, the federation president noted, the disconnect between union popularity and results has led the AFL-CIO, in its preparations for the 2020 presidential campaign, to undertake a massive education effort among its affiliates' members, prepping them on questions for the contenders. The quizzes are a prelude to what Trumka predicts will be a record labor political effort next year.

Those questions involve kitchen-table issues, such as years of stagnant wages, pensions which crashed in the Great Recession, increased corporate shifting of health care spending from firms to workers, and the right to organize free of corporate interference and repression. The

kitchen-table questions also include so-called "free trade" pacts and business's corresponding massive export of U.S. jobs to Mexico.

Those issues and others have come up on the campaign trail as unionists have quizzed some of the hopefuls. The results, Trumka said, have been gratifying.

"We're excited that all the candidates are talking about workers' rights and unions, and that's a big plus," Trumka said when asked to rank five top contenders: former Vice President Joe Biden, Sens. Bernie Sanders (Ind-Vermont), Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts), and Kamala Harris (D-California), and South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

Trumka declined to rank them. "Any (AFL-CIO) endorsement will come from the bottom up – from our members through our executive council," he replied. "And it'll take 70% of the vote there."

"They're asking candidates about their position on different issues that are important to them, and forcing the candidates to think about it," Trumka said of union members. "And if they have a position, it's stated. If they don't, they think it through and get a position. That's where we've been largely successful and we will do that again."

And in that respect, all the current hopefuls differ from 2016 Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, whom most unions supported early in her contest with Sanders. She put kitchen table issues second, behind criticizing Donald Trump, said Trumka.

He added that the possibility of winning workers' votes will increase if candidates spend more time talking about "changing the rules – and it's not just trade, it's tax laws, it's regulations, it's health and safety, it's education, it's health care, it's pensions.... It's bankruptcy laws that have stripped workers of their pensions over the years."

On other issues, Trumka reiterated labor's opposition to the nomination of Eugene Scalia, a pro-management attorney, to be the new Labor Secretary. Trump formally sent Scalia's name to the Senate on August 26. A confirmation hearing was slated for mid-September.

"We actively opposed him in 2002, because his record was so bad," Trumka stated. "It's only gotten worse. His views are dangerously outside the mainstream."

### Seafarers International Union Notice to All Unlicensed Crew Members

#### Know Your Rights -- The Weingarten Decision

In a court case known as *NRLB v. WEINGARTEN*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled you have the right to have your union representative present at any meeting with a supervisor, if you reasonably believe that the meeting may lead to disciplinary action.

You have the right to request a union representative (on a ship where there is no union delegate, just ask for another SIU member to be present). YOU must make the request! Management has no obligation to inform you of this right.

Management has the choice to grant the request, discontinue the interview, or offer the employee the choice to continue without a representative, or have no interview at all.

You have the right to confer with your representative privately, prior to answering any questions, and to receive advice and counsel during the interview.

## Notice: Free Insurance Coverage for Members

All Unlicensed Personnel: As of October 1, 2019, the Seafarers International Union will be providing Life Insurance coverage to all SIU members through a policy contracted with the Prudential Insurance Company. There is no cost to you for this coverage! If you are an SIU member, please contact your local Representative or the SIU Membership Department to receive a copy of the policy and a beneficiary designation form. The SIU is pleased to provide this benefit to our members to protect them and their families. Stay safe out there!

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East Coast Representative: Sam Spain ([sspain@seafarers.org](mailto:sspain@seafarers.org))

SIU Membership Department: Diana Marrone ([dmarrone@seafarers.org](mailto:dmarrone@seafarers.org))



# EPI Asks (and Answers): How is Economy Working for America's Working Families?

A new report from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) thoroughly examines the economic plight of American workers.

"This report makes clear that despite an unemployment rate below 4%, wage growth continues to elude the vast majority of working families," noted EPI Vice President John Schmitt. "This is a result of a decades-long attack on labor unions, and trickledown policies that put corporate profits and CEO pay ahead of the rights and wages of working people."

A headline on one of the essays contained in the overall report stated, "Working people have been thwarted in their efforts to bargain for better wages by attacks on unions."

The report, available online at [epi.org](http://epi.org), was launched just before Labor Day. The research therein is consistent with the nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank's self-described mission of "including the needs of low- and middle-income workers in economic policy discussions.... EPI conducts research and analysis on the economic status of working America. EPI proposes public policies that protect and improve the economic conditions of low- and middle-income workers and assesses policies with respect to how they affect those workers."

One of the report components, by Heidi Shierholz, points out that the "share of workers represented by unions has dropped by more than half since 1979 – from 27.0% to 11.7% in 2018. Not coincidentally, the share of income going to the top 10% has escalated in this period – these high earners now capture nearly half of all income. The decline of unions is not because people don't want to be in unions. They do: The share of people who either have union coverage or report they want it is 60% – the same as it was 40 years ago. But employers' aggressive efforts to dismantle unions and impede organizing efforts have robbed workers of this opportunity. We need fundamental reform of labor law to restore and protect workers' rights to come together and have a voice in their workplace."

Her conclusion about the need for labor law reform is shared by the AFL-CIO, to which the SIU is affiliated. Such reform is one of the federation's top priorities, though it's also an enormous challenge.

"Impeding union representation has been a primary goal of corporate interests in recent decades, and these interests have convinced conservative policymakers to attack collective bargaining through legislation, executive rulemaking, and the courts," Shierholz added. "Meanwhile, policymakers claiming to care about the economic struggles of typical Americans have too often turned a blind eye to these attacks. But if workers are not able to effectively organize into unions, broadly shared prosperity that extends to most working people has virtually no chance."

Her part of the report states it is "no surprise that workers want unions." The EPI, using government data, found that on average, a worker covered by a union contract earns 13.2% more than a peer with similar education, occupation, and experience in a nonunionized workplace in the same sector.

Union workers also are more likely to have employer-sponsored health insurance, and their employers tend to contribute more toward those plans. They are also more likely to have paid vacation and sick leave, more input into the number of hours they work, and more predictable schedules. Union employers are more likely to offer retirement plans and to contribute more toward those plans than comparable nonunion employers, the EPI found.

Other benefits of union representation, according to the report, include providing workers due-process protec-

tions; creating safer workplaces ("because union workers are protected by their unions from repercussions for reporting safety issues, they are more likely to report safety concerns"); and shrinking the racial wage gap.

"Furthermore, the benefits of collective bargaining extend beyond those employees who are represented by a union," Shierholz wrote. "Where unions are strong, they effectively set broader standards that nonunion employers must meet in order to attract and retain the workers they need and to avoid facing an organizing drive. The combination of the direct effect of unions on union members and this 'spillover' effect to nonunion workers means unions are crucial in fostering a vibrant middle class and reducing income inequality."

Shierholz also debunks a view held by some outside the labor movement that the decline in collective bargaining has occurred naturally. "Quite the contrary," she wrote. "Fierce corporate opposition has suppressed workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively. Intense and aggressive anti-union campaigns – once confined to the most anti-union employers – have become widespread; it is now typical, when workers seek to organize, for their employers to hire union avoidance consultants to orchestrate fierce anti-union campaigns."

"And though the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) makes it illegal for employers to intimidate, coerce, or fire

workers in retaliation for participating in union-organizing campaigns, the penalties are insufficient to provide a serious economic disincentive for such behavior (there are no punitive damages or criminal charges under the NLRA; penalties may consist of being required to post a notice or reinstate illegally fired workers)," she continued. "This means that many illegal tactics can be actively pursued; for example, employers often threaten to close the worksite, cut union activists' hours or pay, or report workers to immigration enforcement authorities if employees unionize. More than one in seven union organizers and activists are illegally fired while trying to organize unions at their place of work."

Yet, despite such conduct, policymakers "have egregiously failed to update labor laws to rebalance the system," she said. "In fact, in many cases policy is moving backward; 27 states have passed so-called right-to-work laws, which are intended to undermine union finances by making it illegal for unions to require nonunion members of a collective bargaining unit (who don't pay union dues) to pay 'fair share fees' – fees that cover only the basic costs of representing employees in the workplace. And the Supreme Court decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* – a case financed by a small group of foundations with ties to the largest and most powerful corporate lobbies – made 'right-to-work' the law of the land for all public-sector unions. Conclusion: We need to protect workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively."



## Everyday Savings

### Save every day with union member-only discounts

on everything from fashion and beauty to electronics and everyday household items. And whether it's date night or a fun family night out, enjoy delicious, union family discounts at select restaurants.

Find out more about this and other great Union Plus programs by visiting [unionplus.org](http://unionplus.org).



### 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](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:

<https://www.seafarers.org/news/labor-maritime-news/civmar-news/>

Forms are also available under "SIU Forms" in the ABOUT tab.

#### Contact Information

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Learn more at  
**unionplus.org**



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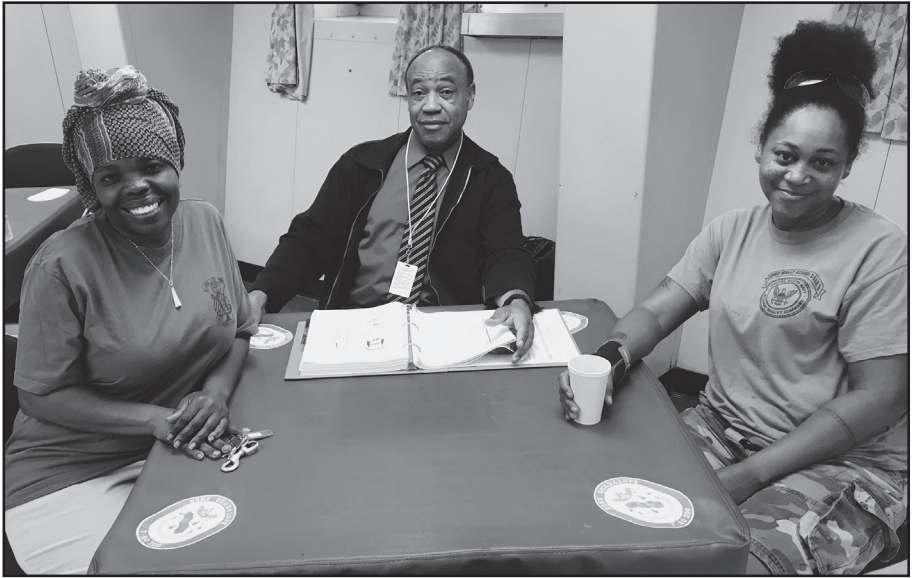




**WITH SIU CIVMARS** – The photo directly above and the one at immediate right were taken aboard the *USNS William McLean*. Steward department members (above, from left) include James Frasier, Elfatesha Carter, Luis A. Ramos Jr., Antionette White, Celeste Bracey and Laura Thomas. At right, the deck crew (and one engine department member) includes Bosun Travis Laws, Bosun Mate Robert Melendez, AB Omary Ally, OS Jereau Scruggs, AB Virgilio Abadam, Pumpman John Mejia and Bosun Mate Joseph Teshara. Thanks to SIU Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain for the photos.



# At Sea and Ashore with the SIU



**ABOARD USNS GUADALUPE** – Pictured on the West Coast are (from left) Sharon Hill, SIU Representative Jesse Ruth and Loretta James. The members volunteered to serve on a shipboard council aimed at facilitating operations.



**CREATIVE COVERS** – AB Romonia Kesler (above) displays some of her handiwork, which also includes covers for bridge wing chairs, forklifts and other reels. Visit the SIU Facebook page (@SeafarersInternational) to see additional photos, including NFL-themed covers created by Kesler.



**ABOARD JOSHUA HUMPHREYS** -- Members flank SIU VP Government Services Kate Hunt on the fleet replenishment oiler in Norfolk, Virginia.



**TALKING MARITIME WITH CONGRESSWOMAN** -- SIU Port Agent Georg Kenny (left) and SIU Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain (right) welcome U.S. Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Virginia) to a Hampton Roads Port Council meeting earlier this year in Norfolk, Virginia. They and other meeting attendees discussed various maritime issues. Rep. Luria reiterated her strong backing of the U.S. Merchant Marine.