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Unions Fight Against Anti-Labor Memo

The Federal Workers Alliance (FWA) didn't wait around when it got wind of an anti-union memo from the White House.

In mid-February, the coalition (to which the SIU is affiliated) sent letters to key members of Congress objecting to the memo, which threatens collective bargaining rights for hundreds of thousands of workers. That group potentially includes members of the SIU Government Services Division.

The FWA communication cited a news article that revealed "a plan by the White House aimed at stripping Department of Defense (DOD) workers of their collective bargaining rights. The article cites a January 29 Trump Administration memo to Secretary Esper giving him the authority to deny DOD, "agencies or subdivisions thereof" from Title V of the federal labor law that stipulates, "Each employee shall have the right to form, join, or assist any labor organization, or to refrain from any such activity, freely and without fear of penalty or reprisal, and each employee shall be protected in the exercise of such right." As the Chair-

persons of the committees overseeing the Department of the Defense and Federal Employee related matters, we ask for your assistance in working to block this misguided effort."

The alliance further wrote, "It is no secret that since taking office three years ago this administration has undertaken an all-out assault on federal workers and their unions. This is crystal clear when you look back to May 25, 2018 when President Trump signed three Executive Orders (EOs 13836, 13837, 13839) that are aimed at (1) the eventual elimination of collective bargaining rights for federal workers, and (2) to transform the federal government into an 'at-will' employer where workers have little to no due process protections and, with the exception of discrimination, can be fired for any reason at all. These EOs sent a clear directive to government agencies to move forward with all but eliminating the ability of federal unions to represent their members, among many other draconian measures. The revelation of this January 29 memo and the directive therein is another peg

in the overall effort to dismantle federal labor unions.

"As both of you are well aware, the DOD is the largest government agency, employing well over 700,000 federal employees throughout the nation and the world," the communication continued. "Many of these workers are a part of a collective bargaining unit and represented by a union. Not only do we, as unions, represent our members, we also work in coalition and partnership with DOD components all throughout the department. Our goal is to work cohesively together in order to not only support our fighting men and women, but meet our mission safely and efficiently. These are partnerships that have existed for decades, have reaped great benefits for our nation, and have allowed us to achieve our missions with pride, and success. Eliminating unions from the DOD will result in great disruptions to the mission, create inefficiencies across the board, and be a disservice to the taxpayers."

The coalition said the administration used a supposed rationale of national se-

curity "as a guise to justify their union-busting. It is our members who show up to work every day with the sole purpose of supporting our fighting men and women, and our nation's national security. We are part of the fabric of the DOD and the nation, something we are proud of and take very seriously. Inferring that unions and national security are incompatible as a means toward fulfilling an ideological goal of eliminating collective bargaining rights is an insult."

The letter concluded with a request to "work together to include language in the House Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act blocking this, or any similar effort by this administration, to take away collective bargaining rights from current and future DOD civilian workers."

A number of lawmakers – from both sides of the aisle – have subsequently spoken out in support of the workers and their longstanding right to choose union representation. They have vowed to fight against the White House directive and support workers.

CIVMAR-Crewed Hospital Ships Mobilize for Pandemic Relief

Bipartisan Legislation Enacted to Help Workers as Nation Combats Coronavirus

With the world reeling from the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic, the SIU mobilized to protect its members while still providing essential services.

At press time, the CIVMAR-crewed *USNS Comfort* and *USNS Mercy* were being prepared for deployment "as needed to assist potentially overwhelmed counties with acute patient care," Jonathan Rath Hoffman, assistant to the defense secretary for public affairs, said during a March 18 news conference at the Pentagon. He was joined at the briefing by Air Force Brig. Gen. (Dr.) Paul Friedrichs, the Joint Staff surgeon.

At that time, the *Comfort* was in Norfolk, Virginia, for maintenance, and the Navy was asked to expedite it, Hoffman said, adding that it may take "a little while" for the vessel to be ready to go. It will go to New York when its maintenance is complete.

The *Mercy* was on the West Coast and was expected to be ready to go in "days, not weeks," Hoffman said, and where it will go was to be determined when it was ready to sail.

Meanwhile, NOAA suspended all sailings for 30 days, and mariners worldwide were facing varying levels of restriction to ship.

The SIU took steps to reduce its staffs at headquarters and hiring halls to skeleton crews. Similar measures were being implemented at the union-affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education, located in Piney Point, Maryland.

In a related development specifically for SIU members, Union Plus made an

important announcement regarding hardship grants. Those enrolled in Union Plus credit card, mortgage, loan or insurance programs who have been affected by layoffs due to the COVID-19 may be eligible for these grants that range up to \$500. Inquiries about this benefit may be directed to Kristy Clements, SIU Union Plus Liaison, 5201 Auth Way, Camp Springs, Maryland 20746.

Moreover, President Donald Trump on March 18 signed into law a \$100 billion coronavirus relief package. Titled the Families First Corona Virus Response Act, the law is a byproduct of a compromise between House Democrats, the administration, and House Republicans – which led to the bill's original provisions being scaled back.

The wide-ranging measure, among other important components:

- Includes funding to support workers who get sick as well as those who have to care for children who are out of school because of the coronavirus response.

- Includes money intended to expand programs for workers who have been laid off from their jobs, including additional funding for states' unemployment programs.

- Bolsters unemployment insurance including nutrition assistance and guarantees free diagnostic testing for the coronavirus.

- Provides up to 10 days of paid sick leave for some workers. It caps the amount for companies with 500 employees and would allow for those with fewer than 50 to apply for a waiver.

The economic relief bill marks the second such aid package to become law in a



File photo of CIVMAR-crewed *USNS Mercy* in San Diego. (Photo by Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Zach Kreitzer)

matter of weeks and comes at a time when the Trump administration is negotiating with Senators on an economic stimulus package to assist small businesses, American workers and specific sectors such as the airline industry impacted by the coronavirus. The White House has proposed a \$1 trillion stimulus package, which would include sending direct cash payments to Americans.

The passage of this bill signals major progress in Congress's response to the coronavirus, though there are still many gaps it does not address.

When this edition of *The Federal Mariner* went to press, the coronavirus had—among other things—infected more than 7,000 Americans, caused 141 deaths, shuttered schools across the country, forced restaurants and other businesses to close, and caused airlines to significantly cut back on flights.

Editor's note: Check the SIU website (www.seafarers.org) for updates. Members also are encouraged to sign up for SIU text alerts – just text the word "join" (without the quotation marks) to 97779.

President's Column

Stay Informed and Support Each Other

As this edition went to press, the coronavirus pandemic continued wreaking havoc with everyday life in the United States and indeed across the globe.



Michael Sacco

I encourage all CIVMARS, other SIU Government Services Division members and their families to take the situation seriously, but don't panic. Stay informed, be good neighbors, and remember we're all in this together. A crisis of this magnitude should unite us.

PRO Act

While we in the labor movement aren't kidding ourselves about the prospects of the PRO Act quickly advancing in the Senate, the House's passage of this pro-worker bill is still quite noteworthy. It establishes an important building block and lets us see where legislators stand on labor law reform and workers' rights.

The surest way to grow the middle class is through collective bargaining and union representation. Government data and other studies consistently show that union members earn more money and enjoy better benefits than their unrepresented counterparts. Union apprenticeships (many of which are done in partnership with employers) often provide a clear path to rewarding careers, too.

Management also benefits from strong unions. When workers have a voice on the job and are compensated fairly, they're much more likely to be reliable and efficient and to stick around, thereby reducing turnover and its associated costs. Unions provide accountability on both sides as well.

By any reasonable measure, many of America's labor laws are broken. More often than not, the deck is stacked against workers who seek to join or form a union – and there's no recourse against employers who violate their employees' rights in union organizing campaigns and elections.

The PRO Act is good for workers and good for America. The UIW stands behind it and will work to overcome any obstacles to it becoming law.

Election Day Approaches

Election Day will be here before we know it, and it's definitely not too soon for members to make sure you're registered to vote. Go online or check with your union rep if you need assistance. Every vote counts, and that's not a cliché. It's the truth.

Back when we were heading towards the winter holidays, someone forwarded me a message that said, you can save money on Christmas gifts this year by making it a point to talk about politics at Thanksgiving dinner. I laughed and shook my head at the same time.

Civility can be in short supply when engaging in political action or political discussions, but it doesn't have to be a lost art. I encourage everyone to remember that we all want what's best for our great nation, and while there's nothing wrong with strongly felt disagreement, we can all benefit from focusing on facts and maintaining respect for each other.

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:

<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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The SIU and Seafarers Plans will remain headquartered in the same building they've used since 1982, but the street name is changing.

SIU HQ Getting New Street Name, Though Location Remains Unchanged

The union and Seafarers Plans are not relocating their headquarters operations – but they're getting a new street name, effective April 20, 2020.

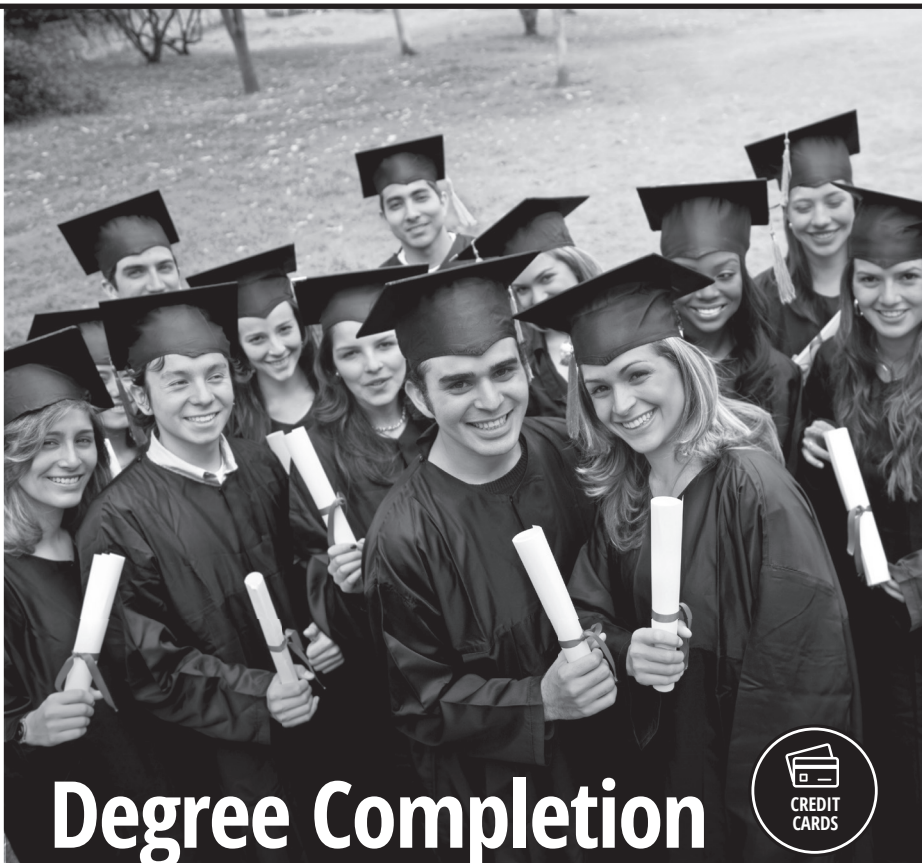
Because of a government-ordered change, the new address is:

5201 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, Maryland 20746

The old address (since 1982, when the SIU relocated from New York) was 5201 Auth Way, Camp

Springs, Maryland 20746. All phone and fax numbers for the building remain unchanged.

The union and Seafarers Plans did not seek this change and, in fact, petitioned against it, to no avail. Other organizations along the same street in Prince George's County also are being forced to comply with the alteration. The street itself already had been named Capital Gateway Drive beyond the Seafarers building, which is next to a subway station.



The Union Plus Bachelor's Degree Completion Program offers students from working families the opportunity to continue their education beyond an associate's degree. This complement to the Union Plus Free College Program allows union members and their eligible family members to complete a bachelor's degree at a highly discounted cost.

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



Learn more at unionplus.org



UNIONPLUS

Union’s Puerto Rico Relief Efforts Continue

The SIU hasn’t let up in its efforts to provide relief supplies to Puerto Rico residents recovering from a series of earthquakes.

The union has teamed up with numerous other labor organizations, businesses including Jones Act vessel operators, and other supporters who are donating, transporting and distributing supplies in the commonwealth.

During a news conference at the SIU hall in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on March 2, SIU Port Agent Amancio Crespo stated, “As SIU President Michael Sacco has pointed out, our organization is committed to this relief effort for the long haul. We’ve already been working on it for months, and we’ll be here all the way.”

Crespo added, “Thank you to our fellow unions and to all the companies that are joining together to get the job done. This truly is a team effort and it wouldn’t be possible without all of you. I also want to say a special thank you to the many members of the Seafarers International Union who’ve stepped up and volunteered their time and effort to help our fellow citizens. You guys and gals are the greatest, and your commitment absolutely is not taken for granted.”

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten also spoke at the press conference, where she thanked those involved in the relief effort and also pointed out that the needs remain significant.

The aforementioned earthquakes included a 6.4-magnitude event on Jan. 7 that resulted in severe infrastructure damage. Schools initially were closed for three weeks. Some of the territory’s 295,000 students then began returning to class outside of the damaged areas, but upwards of 600 of the island’s 856 schools were still closed as of early March. Some were awaiting safety inspections; others can’t reopen without major repairs.

With that in mind, the labor-led relief effort has included a focus on event-style tents for use as temporary classrooms. Commitments have been secured for 120 such tents, mainly for use in Guayanilla, Guanica and the other heavily damaged municipalities.

The efforts specifically involving temporary classroom facilities are being coordinated with local and state government personnel.



Unloading a container from Houston at the hall in San Juan Feb. 21 are (from left) AB Angel Pagan, QMED James Sanchez, Chief Cook Michael Caquias, AB Joseph Dupree, Administrative Asst. Maria Gomez, Apprentice Angel Galarza, Port Agent Amancio Crespo.

Other relief items that either already have been donated or are in the works include various foods, school supplies, personal-size tents, portable battery-power lighting systems, folding tables and chairs, water filters, bottled water, mosquito nets and much more. All of the items have shipped on Jones Act vessels (pro bono).

Among the organizations participating in the outreach are the SIU, the AFL-CIO, the Maritime Trades Department and its port councils, the AFT and its affiliates, AF-SCME, the AMO, the ILA, the Teamsters, the Bakery Workers and its contracted employer Bimbo Bakeries, LIUNA, the UAW, the Steelworkers, Crowley Maritime, TOTE Maritime, SEACOR Holdings, National Shipping of America, and American Tent Co. (That’s a partial list, and any omissions are inadvertent.)

The relief effort hasn’t been limited to donated items. During a joint assessment by the AFL-CIO, AFT and

the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR, part of the AFT), it became known that many local unions (among others) reported the need for mental health services for members and their families. As noted in a summary of the relief plan, “Hurricane Maria, the subsequent flooding, and now the earthquakes have left many Puerto Ricans deeply scarred and traumatized.”

Teams of licensed mental-health professionals started heading to the commonwealth last month.

Meanwhile, SIU hiring halls in Houston, Philadelphia, Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, continue serving as staging areas for donated cargoes.

In Puerto Rico, numerous SIU members have helped unload and then distribute the items to needy areas. In many cases, Seafarers are using their own personal vehicles, because larger ones cannot traverse the damaged roads in the southern parts of the territory.

House Passes Protecting the Right to Organize Act

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka called it “the most significant step Congress has taken to strengthen labor laws in the United States in 85 years and a win for workers everywhere.”

The U.S. House of Representatives on Feb. 6 passed the Protecting the Right to Organize Act (HR 2474), with bipartisan support. The final tally was 224 in favor and 194 against. Also known as the PRO Act, the bill would change some of the nation’s labor laws by penalizing companies that retaliate against workers who try to organize. The bill aims to strengthen collective bargaining rights, and to weaken state-enacted right-to-work (for less) laws.

For example, there are currently no penalties on employers and no compensation for a worker when an employee is fired or faces retaliation for trying to organize a union. As passed, the PRO Act would call for fines for violations of the National Labor Relations Act. It would require the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to go to court for an injunction to reinstate workers if the NLRB believes they illegally have been retaliated against for union activities.

The PRO Act also establishes a timely process for gaining a first contract – including mediation and, if needed, binding arbitration. The bill would permit unions and employers to reach a “fair share” clause requiring all workers covered by a collectively bargained contract to contribute towards the cost of bargaining and administering the agreement in all 50 states.

Among its reforms, the PRO Act would repeal the section of the Taft-Hartley Act that permits states to enact so-called right-to-work laws. It also would outlaw “captive audience” meetings where bosses can force workers to listen to anti-union presentations, often from outside consultants (better known as union-busters).

The bill will also tighten the definitions of independent contractor and supervisor, making sure that eligible workers can organize if they so choose. The legislation would prohibit employers from permanently replacing strikers.

At a press conference in the U.S. Capitol on Feb. 5 conducted by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Trumka let others know the importance of the bill: “Those who would oppose, delay or derail this legislation, do not ask us – do not ask

tional Union for Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers; and representatives of many other unions who are here with us today.”

Also speaking at the press conference were House Education and Labor Committee Chairman Bobby Scott (D-Virginia), U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-Florida), U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross (D-New Jersey), U.S. Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Washington) and U.S. Rep. Andy Levin (D-Michigan).

“We all want to talk about a seat at the table,” Pelosi said. “The most important table to us is America’s kitchen tables, where families come together to make decisions about their families. And we don’t want them to have to struggle unnecessarily, when there is an opportunity for them to do better. And I want to thank the AFL-CIO and all in the labor movement for what they have done to make the future better for so many families in America.”

“I know how important it is to give workers a voice and protect them from unfair labor practices because I lived it,” said Norcross, a former business agent for the IBEW Local 351 and president of the Southern New Jersey AFL-CIO. “I fought for New Jerseyans at the negotiating table for decades. Workers win when they can band together and collectively bargain for safer workplaces, higher wages and better benefits. Today, my colleagues and I took a major leap forward in restoring fairness to an economy that’s rigged against workers. I urge the Senate to act swiftly and pass the PRO Act to level the playing field for American workers and their families.”

Levin, vice chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, made the following remarks on the House Floor after voting in favor of the bill: “I have spent most of my career helping workers form unions and bargain collectively. The power of workers to unite and demand fair wages, better benefits, and safer working conditions is truly inspiring, and it’s essential for working families simply trying to get by. Right now, corporate profits are skyrocketing while the share of health care costs paid by employers is falling. Worker productivity is at its peak, yet wages are stagnant. The gap between the rich and the poor is the highest ever recorded. It should be no surprise that while all this is happening, union membership is at its lowest point in decades. The PRO Act is about reversing these trends so workers can enjoy their fair share in the economy that they help create. Recent studies have shown that in cities where union membership is strong, children in low-income families go on to ascend to higher income levels than their parents. Isn’t that what every parent wants? Creating a pathway to a better life – that is the American dream, and that is the power of a union.”

In a press release, Trumka (a longtime friend of the SIU) said, “I applaud the U.S. House for passing the PRO Act. America’s labor laws are no longer an effective means for working people to have our voices heard. The long-overdue PRO Act will provide significant protections for workers exercising our legal right to form a union, a right that’s been trampled on for decades by union-busting consultants and anti-worker politicians.”

He recently pointed out that unions are now more popular than ever, saying, “A Gallup poll found that 64 percent of Americans approve of unions and research from MIT shows nearly half of non-union workers – more than 60 million people – would vote to join today if given the opportunity. Twenty-five years ago, only one-third of workers said the same thing. What explains the gap between desire for union representation and existing union representation? Simply put, unscrupulous employers and outdated labor laws have created an environment where it has never been harder to form a union.”

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

the labor movement – for a dollar or a door knock! We won’t be coming!” he said.

Pelosi said, “I am so proud to stand here with Richard Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO; Chris Shelton, president of Communication Workers of America; Jennifer Dorning, president of Department for Professional Employees of the AFL-CIO; John Samuelson, president, Transport Workers Union; Jim Slevin, president, Utilities Workers Union of America; Tim Driscoll, president, Interna-



ABOARD THOMAS JEFFERSON – Members gather for a union meeting on the vessel in Norfolk, Virginia, with SIU Representative Sam Spain (who took the photo).



WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS – Congratulations and welcome to new members (from left) Reefer Engineer Frank Buckman, OS Carlene Mitchell, OS Christian Howe and AB Eric Gardner. They're pictured on the *Joshua Humphreys* in Norfolk, Virginia.

At Sea and Ashore with the SIU



ABOARD USNS BURLINGTON – SIU Port Agent Jimmy White (left) meets with members at the Halter Marine shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi.



JOINING THE SIU -- EET Glenn Burton fills out his paperwork for joining the Seafarers International Union's Government Services Division. He's pictured aboard the NOAA vessel *Pisces*.



MEETING ON WEST COAST -- SIU Asst. VP Joe Vincenzo (right) and SIU Representative Jesse Ruth (standing) meet with union members in late February at the CSU West Coast.