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 a member) 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 sub-agencies’ 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 Chairperson 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 rights. 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 pag 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 security “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. Infering that unions and national security are incommensurable is 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 Piny 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, 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 current and future DOD civilian support workers.

The coalition further wrote, “As 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 passage of this bill signals major progress in Congress’s response to the coronavirus, though there are still many gaps it does not address.

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 SIU (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. 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.

Michael Sacco

**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 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 one another.

**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 Audubon 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.

**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 members 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/cvmar-news/

Forms are also available under “SIU Forms” in the ABOUT tab.

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**DISCOUNTS**

- Mortgage Program
- Wireless Discounts
- Car Rentals
- Car Loans
- Credit Cards
- Renters Insurance
- Life Insurance
- Home Insurance
The PRO Act also establishes a timely process for gaining a first contract – including a focus on event-style tents for use as temporary classrooms. Commitments have been secured for 129 tents, mainly for use in Guaynabo, Guanica and other heavily damaged municipalities.

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

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, 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 in affiliates, AFSCME, 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 Company. (That’s a partial list and any donations are inadver lent. The relief effort hasn’t been limited to donated items. During a joint assessment by the AFL-CIO, AFT and the Association of Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMP, part of the AFT), it became evident that many local unions (among others) reported the need for mental health services. In addition, nearly 60% of the respondents indicated that one of the key needs 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 cargos.

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.
At Sea and Ashore with the SIU

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.

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

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

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.

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.