Three unions including the SIU have teamed up to formally protest the manner in which federal mariners have been restricted to their respective vessels during the pandemic. The outcome of the grievance may not be known until near the end of this year or next year. Arbitration or a settlement are possible.

“Our members have made many sacrifices because of their role as essential workers,” stated SIU Vice President Government Services Kate Hunt. “They deserve fair treatment, because of their role as essential workers,”

In mid-April, the SIU issued the following statement:

“The Seafaring International Union (SIU) joins with our Brothers and Sisters in the Mas- ters, Mates and Pilots (MMP&Ps) and the Marine Engineers’ Beneficial Association in the spirit and intention of the grievance they have filed against Military Sealift Command regarding the imposition of a disparate “Gangways Up” order issued on March 21, 2020 for all MSC/CVIMAR-crewed vessels. Therefore, in accordance with Article VII, Section 6 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between the SIU and MSC, the SIU files the following Union Management grievance on behalf of all unlicensed CVIMARS adversely impacted by the Restriction-to-Ship Order. The order blatantly violates the terms and conditions of the 1997 Memorandum of Under- standing between the USCG & Maritime Labor Affairs. The SIU recognizes that MSC has latitude to restrict crews in certain situations, however, in accordance with Section C of the MOU, those situations are limited, as follows:

“C. During a period when the senior U.S. military or senior U.S. Navy Commander and their duly authorized designee in an overseas theatre of operation determines that a credible security threat exists for all U.S. Department of Defense employees in a particular overseas port.”

For MSC to allow open shipboard access to all other personnel (to include Navy, shipyard workers, numerous government contractors, foreign nationals, other shore visitors, etc.), while restricting the CVIMAR crews is a complete violation of the MOU. In addition, allowing all other persons to come in and go freely aboard USNS and USS-CVIMAR-crewed vessels during this pandemic is ineffective and dangerous to the safety and health of the CVIMAR crews and contrary to MSC’s stated reason for imposing the restriction which was to protect the CVIMARS.”

Numerous discussions with MSC management have not produced an acceptable resolution to this conflict. Therefore, the SIU submits this grievance on behalf of all unlic- ensed CVIMARS on every CVIMAR-crewed ship worldwide for the period beginning with the issuance of the “Gangways Up” order on March 21, 2020 and continuing through the period specified herein. As remedy, and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the SIU’s grievance, the SIU is seeking the payment of penalty pay for all off-duty hours as unlicensed CVIMAR was restricted to the ship and not allowed liberty. The SIU recognizes we are living through extraordinary and unprecedented times and we support all reasonable efforts to keep the CVIMAR crews safe, but this restriction is not achieving that goal and is causing extreme distress to the unlicensed members we repre- sent. We are available at any time to discuss settlement of this matter.

Editor’s note: SIU members are encouraged to regularly check the union’s website for the latest union-specific news about the pandemic. There is a prominent COVID-19 section on the home page. Members may also sign up for text alerts by texting the word “join” (without the quotation marks) to 97779.
President's Column

Opportunity for Justice

For those of us in the labor movement, or, really, for anyone familiar with our work, the awful irony was impossible to miss. Vandal’s extensively damaged the lobby and other first-floor areas of the AFL-CIO headquarters building late on May 31. They broke windows and doors and set fires in the facility as other individuals engaged in peaceful, legitimate demonstrations in the nation’s capital (and across the country).

For those who don’t know, the AFL-CIO building is across from the White House. Ultimately, as AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said, the building itself is just that – a building. Thankfully, no one was inside at the time, and the sprinkler system at least limited the damage, which nevertheless was extensive.

The irony, of course, is that the federation and its affiliates, including the SIU, have long been on the front lines of the fight for racial justice – not just when it comes to law enforcement, but also for economic equality. Unions typically have higher percentages of minorities in their memberships than the general public. The gains we’ve secured throughout the decades have helped union and unrepresented workers (of all colors) alike, but for those who enjoy the benefits of membership, we focus not on race but on the “black and white” written in the contract.

Many, many years ago, the SIU was segregated. I am not blind to the racism that existed in the labor movement in general, either. Thankfully, we turned the corner within our ranks a long time ago. It’s certainly possible to cherry-pick examples of current individual discrimination, but on the whole, organized labor has been and remains at the forefront of this fight.

While we’re on the subject, let’s get something straight. When someone says, “Black Lives Matter,” they are not saying other lives don’t matter.

We all saw the video of George Floyd being suffocated by a police officer – a sickening sight that ultimately resulted in Floyd’s death. It’s not an isolated example, and it called attention to a longstanding problem in a way that cannot and must not be avoided.

But that’s not the only struggle faced by our African-American brothers and sisters. I’m not sure how widely known this is, but historically, black workers have faced unemployment rates twice as high as those of their white counterparts. And from what I’ve read, the statistics can’t be explained away by differences in levels of education. At every level of education, the black unemployment rate is significantly higher than the white unemployment rate, even for those workers with college or advanced degrees.

Outside the labor movement, there are, also, to this day, significant wage gaps between white and black workers. No matter how you slice the data, that’s the reality.

Here’s some more reality: Almost all police officers are decent people doing their best in a difficult job. Most people aren’t racists, and, as we saw with the AFL-CIO building, there are those who want to create trouble.

But we still live in a world divided in many ways by color lines. To build a different, better economy and better way of life, we need power that can only come from the communities in which our members live – both the problems and the solutions. We have to find a way to see with each other’s eyes.

As with any longstanding problem, there isn’t an overnight solution here. But I’m confident in our country, our movement, our union. Let’s keep the lines of communication and dialogue open and let’s work together – for meaningful change.

Michael Sacco

Absenteed Voting Has Deep Roots in United States History

While it might be making recent headlines, there’s very little about absentee voting that is new. According to the Constitutional Accountability Center, “One of the earliest known instances of absentee voting occurred during the American Revolution. In December 1775, a group of soldiers from the Continental Army sent a letter back to their town asking if their votes could be counted in a local election. And at the town meeting held to discuss the issue, the town agreed to count the votes, ‘as if the men were present themselves.’”

During the War of 1812, Pennsylvania allowed soldiers to cast absentee ballots if they were stationed more than two miles from their home. After the end of the Civil War, the states gradually passed new laws to expand absentee voting to civilians. Between 1911 and 1924, 45 of the 48 states adopted some kind of absentee voting.

By World War II, every state let soldiers vote absentee, and the military was responsible for about 3.2 million absentee ballots cast, nearly seven percent of the total electorate in the 1944 presidential election. For a more recent example, in the 2016 election, about 24 percent of all ballots were cast in the mail, according to the federal Election Assistance Commission.


Requests for an absentee ballot may be made online by visiting absentee.vote.org, and filling out a short request form.

Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington already send ballots to all eligible voters, so residents do not need to request one. All states permit residents who will be outside their home county to vote absentee, as well as voters with an illness or disability. Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia also offer the option to elderly voters.
Congressional Reps Voice Strong Support for Merchant Marine

United States Reps. Steny Hoyer (D-Maryland) and Elaine Luria (D-Virginia) are reminding fellow members of Congress that the U.S. Merchant Marine is vital to national, economic and homeland security.

Luria on May 7 hosted a press call featuring Hoyer along with American maritime industry leaders, including SIU Executive Director Augie Tellez, Marine Engineers’ Beneficial Association President Marshall Asley; American Maritime Executives’ Executive Director Christian Spain; Maritime Trades Department Executive Secretary-Treasurer Daniel Duncan; Maersk Line, Limited President Bill Woodhour; and others.

Luria and Hoyer said they are pushing to include U.S.-flag shipping and the number of seafarers in future legislation. In particular, they are urging that the American maritime industry, along with all of the other industries that we care about, receive additional stipends. They also recommend increasing the U.S. merchant marine’s workforce by raising the cargo preference to sustain America’s oceangoing fleet and mariner community.

The American maritime industry is an absolutely critical component of our overall national security,” Hoyer said. “They know the importance of what they do, and they are dedicated. On behalf of the uniformed heroes of the U.S. Merchant Marine, thank you for everything you do for our country.

Luria recently sent a letter to a U.S. House and Senate leaders asking for their support of American-flag ships and their crews.

Expounding on that communication, she said during the call that, “as a nation, we must remember that in both government service and in commercial cargo, people have left the priority of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, they are urging that the COVID-19 pandemic should remind everyone about the importance of maintaining U.S. manufacturing capabilities. The U.S. Merchant Marine is an essential component of our overall national security,” she stated, and then added her ongoing backing of the Jones Act and cargo preference.

Hoyer, whose district includes the SIU-affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education, said the pandemic should remind everyone about the importance of maintaining U.S. manufacturing capabilities. He said the maritime industry “is facing the same problems every other business in America has run into. This industry is a national security priority – both the ships and the personnel are critically important. We need to make sure they have the resources to be able to do their jobs.”

Hoyer also pointed out that Luria’s active-duty service in the U.S. Navy helps make her “a perfect advocate, a person who has a deep knowledge of the vital role civilian mariners play.”

He said the maritime industry “is facing the same problems every other business in America has run into. This industry is a national security priority – both the ships and the personnel are critically important. We need to make sure they have the resources to be able to do their jobs.”

Luria wrapped up the call by conveying her “thanks to civilian mariners. We will keep pushing to support the MSP and the other things that make the U.S. Merchant Marine continue to be a viable, important part of our economy and our national defense.”

Defense Scholar: Time to Refocus on U.S.-Flag Fleet

Loren Thompson, the chief operating officer for the Lexington Institute, recently wrote an op-ed for the Forbes website about President Biden’s plans to build a stronger maritime industry. Thompson believes that the president’s American maritime strategy would reduce the government’s attention to rebuilding the U.S.-flag fleet.

In a blog post titled “Coronavirus Makes the National Security Case for Rebuilding U.S. Maritime Power Compelling,” Thompson noted that American states as China continues to expand its maritime footprint around the world, especially in shipbuilding and global port operations, America is sailing away. “While we are not in a crisis right now that is competing with COVID-19, U.S. maritime interests and winning,” he notes. “The problem is that official Washington has largely deserted the field, failing to frame policies that can maintain a reasonable balance of maritime interests.”

After recalling how U.S. maritime capabilities were severely lacking at the start of both World War I and II, Thompson reflects how in the present time, “This could be disastrous for the United States. In a major conflict, the U.S. might lack the capacity to import essential goods from other countries, it might lack the shipping tonnage to sustain a protracted sea battle, and it might lack the necessary vessels to sustain important commercial shipments.”

“With a reasonably robust American-flagged commercial fleet, there won’t be enough experienced seamen to sustain a military sealift operation in war,” he adds. Thompson suggested the efforts to support and protect the Jones Act (the nation’s freight cabotage law) and the Maritime Security Program (which provides annual stipends for 60 militarily useful U.S.-flag vessels capable of being deployed in military or national emergency operations), but they are not enough. “Such policies are helpful but inadequate.”

He proposes Congress “bolster the American commercial operating fleet and mariner community by raising the cargo preference requirement for all federally assisted loans to 100 percent.”

In addition, he believes there should be a comprehensive domestic shipbuilding program and an effort to “define the differential operating costs of U.S. ships once they went to sea, since some nations impose painfully high requirements on the credentialing and work conditions of merchant mariners.”

Thompson wraps up his case by stating, “As policymakers rethink economic priorities in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis, now would be a good time to recommit to being a first-class seafaring nation.”

The Lexington Institute is a Virginia-based public policy think-tank that focuses on national security-related issues.

TWICs May Be Used to Obtain ‘TSA PreCheck’

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) on July 8 announced a potential benefit of carrying a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC). The agency indicated that all active TWIC holders as well as Hazardous Materials Endorsement (HME) holders who are U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals or lawful permanent residents are immediately eligible for TSA PreCheck, which can considerably shorten waiting times in airport lines.

“This new benefit immediately allows nearly 3.5 million individuals to obtain TSA PreCheck at no additional cost beyond what they have already paid for their credentials,” said TSA Executive Assistant Administrator for Operations Support Steve Fitzmaurice.

As noted in a news release from the agency, TWIC and HME holders “have already paid for, and successfully completed, a security threat assessment comparable to the TSA PreCheck security threat assessment.”

A TWIC is required by the Maritime Transportation Security Act for workers who need access to secure areas of the nation’s maritime facilities and vessels. The HME program is for individuals seeking to obtain, renew or transfer for an HME on a state-issued commercial driver’s license (CDL) allowing them to transport hazardous materials in commerce.

TWIC and HME holders can obtain TSA PreCheck expedited screening by entering the identification numbers printed on their TWIC card or state-issued CDL during the airline reservation process. Active TWIC holders enter their TWIC credential identification number (CIN) in the known traveler number (KTN) field of their airline reservation. The CIN is printed on the back of each TWIC in the lower-left hand corner.

According to the release, “TSA PreCheck is an expedited screening program offered by TSA that allows travelers to leave on their shoes, light outerwear and belt, keep their laptop in its case and their food and 3-1-1 compliant liquids in a bag on a carry-on, in select TSA airport checkpoint screening lanes. More than 200 airports participate in TSA PreCheck nationwide and dozens of airlines participate in the popular program.”

More information is linked in a July 8 news post on the SIU website and on the TSA website (www.tsa.gov).

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 layoff reinstatements or labor organization elections. The forms are posted at:

https://www.seafarers.org/news/labor-maritime-news/2019/09/05/are-you-a-seafarer-

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

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The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and its Maritime Administration (MARAD) definitely made the best of a challenging circumstance for this year’s National Maritime Day celebration in the nation’s capital. The agency produced a half-hour video and posted it on the MARAD YouTube channel the morning of May 22. Viewer comments reflect sincere appreciation for the stirring tribute, which featured comments from DOT Secretary Elaine L. Chao, U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCom) Commanding Officer Gen. Stephen R. Lyons, Maritime Administrator Mark H. Buzby, TV host Mike Rowe and World War II U.S. Merchant Mariners David Yoho, James Monteleone, George Shaw and Hugh Stevens.

This year’s theme was, “Resilient Seafarer for a Resilient Nation.”

“IT’s great to be with you today - if only virtually – but Maritime Day must go on,” Buzby said in his opening remarks. He then introduced Chao, whom he described as “a strong advocate for the importance of the maritime industry to our nation’s economic growth, and to our national security.”

Chao offered a brief history of the day of remembrance: “National Maritime Day was established by Congress in 1933 to commemorate the first transoceanic voyage of the American steamship Savannah. It was a way to celebrate America’s long and proud maritime history - an innovation that has powered it, from the steamships to modern vessels and beyond. In World War II, merchant mariners were an essential part of the war effort, and their casualty rate exceeded that of all the other Armed Forces.”

She continued, “Today, we salute the men and women of the American maritime community, who have helped ensure that supplies and equipment get to where they need to be during times of peace, war and natural disasters. "Our U.S.-flag fleet is an integral part of our national security, and as we face the COVID-19 crisis of today, the department is doing everything we can to support our country’s maritime sector, and ensure that the industry is able to ramp up when the economic recovery begins.”

Buzby then offered his remarks, speaking from the deck of the SIU-enabled Ready Reserve force vessel SS Comstock at State in Newport News, Virginia.

"Our motto in the U.S. Merchant Marine is, ‘In Peace and War.’ It’s on our merchant marine flag, we talk about it in speeches all the time,” he noted. “It’s been a part of our industry since before this nation was even a nation. It’s what drives all of us who have served at sea and those of us who support those who go to sea. The idea that we’re going to get it through, no matter what – whether it’s peace time, wartime, no matter what, we’re going to get it through.

“And certainly, throughout our nation’s history, this industry has persevered through a Revolutionary War, a Civil War, two global conflicts and any number of regional conflicts,” Buzby added. “The merchant marine has always been there, and has never faltered. Now here we are, facing a new foe, a new global conflict, but this time instead of men versus man, it’s man versus a virus. And the U.S. Merchant Marine is still persevering through it all.”

Buzby then touched on the service of merchant mariners during the Revolutionary War, noting, “Congress just approved recently the Congressional Gold Medal to award those merchant marines veteran of World War II, who ... persevered in wartime to make sure the Allies had victory in Europe and in the Pacific. Today, you mariners are facing the same, very grave challenges, and we have to do the very same thing. We have to come up with countermeasures, things that are going to mitigate that risk and keep our ships sailing, and you’re doing that – whether it’s through personal protective equipment, social distancing, contact tracking, the deep cleaning of our vessels, you’re making it happen and you’re still getting our ships through. And I think that’s a real tribute, as much to you and this generation, as it was to those who preceded you and other generations who did what you had to do to get those ships through. I think it’s something that you all should be very, very proud of.

“I’m very proud of the conduct of all of you, whether it’s been labor, the shippers and operators, or whether it’s been government entities,” he continued. “The level of cooperation that has been exhibited, I think, says much about this industry and why we are so strong and why we have been able to persevere through all these years.”

Buzby concluded, “In the coming months, when we do get this thing behind us, every one of us that had the watch during this time should take a great deal of pride in the fact that, when it was our time, when our nation called upon us, when the challenges were issued, that we all stood tall, did what we had to do, and made it happen. In peace and war.”

Lyons said, “As this audience knows, TRANSCom, one of 11 combatant commands, is responsible to the Secretary of Defense and the Commander in Chief to deploy and sustain military forces around the globe to support our national security interests. In doing so, we count on a strong, well-trained maritime industry that has a long history of enabling victory. Today, just as in World War II, the United States-flags merchant ships, the mariners who crew them, and our commercial sealift industry continue to play a critical role in our nation’s defense by providing sealift ships, mariners, and access to global sealift networks.

He continued, “As a result, the United States’ ability to project and sustain military power across transoceanic distances remains a strategic competitive advantage, and is admired by friends and adversaries. TRANSCom, working with MARAD and key industry partners, provides an essential element of deterrence and, if necessary, the unquestionable ability to respond with overwhelming, decisive force, most of which will be moved by sealift. The resulting combined effort is a world order that encourages peace, and opportunities for freedom, while deterring a great power war for over 75 years and counting.

“The United States is today, and always will be, a maritime nation,” Lyons concluded. “The most important resource of a maritime nation is people: professional men and women of high technical proficiency, who sail with high technical competency, hard work and innovation. That is why, at the end of the day, it is a U.S. flag on a ship, with U.S. crews at the helm, that remain essential to our national defense.”

Yoho began by expressing his thanks on behalf of his fellow merchant veterans for the recent passage of the Congressional Gold Medal Act. He then gave a brief history of the merchant marine in World War II, to which fellow veterans Monteleone, Shaw and (now Capt.) Stevens offered their insight into the life of a World War II mariner.

Following those remarks, Buzby placed a ceremonial wreath into the sea, as the traditional Eight Bells were rung in honor of the fallen mariners. Afterwards, Rowe spoke about his relationship to the maritime industry, including an uncle who was a mariner, before concluding the ceremony with the singing of the Merchant Marine anthem, “Heave Ho.”

Meanwhile, despite pandemic-rooted limitations, the SIU observed National Maritime Day in other newfound ways. SIU Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel and SIU Houston Safety Director Kevin Sykes were featured in separate online interviews about the industry.

President Issues Maritime Day Proclamation

Since the founding of our great Nation, we have relied on merchant mariners to deliver goods to market and strengthen our national security. On National Maritime Day, we recognize the United States Merchant Marine for all it does to facilitate commerce and protect our interests at sea.

Non-US merchant mariners enable peace trade with countries around the world and provide vital sealift support to our Armed Forces. Whether on the oceans or our inland waterways, merchant mariners support our economy by transporting billions of dollars of imported and exported goods. They also train and bring into battle zones to deliver supplies and weapons to our military men and women, playing a critical role in the success of their mission.

This year, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. We pay tribute to the United States merchant mariners who served as the “Fourth Arm of Defense” for our Nation during the war. Earlier this year, I was proud to sign into law long-overdue legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the valiant civilian merchant mariners who maintained critical supply lines to our overseas troops and allies during the Second World War. Many of those mariners endured brutal attacks from German U-boats and more than 6,000 of them perished at sea or were held as prisoners of war. This number includes 142 students of the United States Merchant Marine Academy - distinguishing it as the only one of the five service academies authorized to carry a battle standard.

As we remember the tremendous sacrifices of the World War II merchant mariners, we also continue to honor the present-day citizen mariners who make up our Nation’s world-class Merchant Marine. Today, we pay tribute to their expertise, patriotism, and dedication to serving our country and ensuring our national security.