Rep. Luria Thanks U.S. Mariners, American-Flag Fleet

U.S. Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Virginia) praised the work of American mariners and the U.S. flag fleet while calling upon Congress to continue its support for these workers and the industry.

Luria, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy who served in the Navy for 20 years before being elected to the House of Representatives in 2018, made her statement on the House floor Oct. 25.

“The United States needs a robust U.S.-flag maritime industry and a trained and qualified mariner workforce to support our surge sealift capabilities in responding to the crises and military operations around the world when called upon,” the congresswoman said. “Further, the U.S.-flag fleet routinely responds to disasters and emergencies, moves critical government and military cargo around the world, and carries American farm products in support of U.S. international development programs to help developing countries in need.”

The member of both the House Armed Services and Homeland Security committees called for continuing support for the Maritime Security Program, which provides funds for militarily useful U.S.-flag commercial vessels and crew available to the armed forces in the event of war or national emergencies.

“The shipping industry is facing unprecedented challenges today, but one thing we know all too well is that a strong commercial maritime capability enhances our national security,” she added. She wrapped up her address by thanking “the U.S.-flag fleet and the U.S. Merchant Mariners who work every day to support our military and our nation.”
Gen. Van Ovost Takes Helm At Transportation Command

President Biden on Oct. 14 announced the nomination of Rear Adm. Phillips (USN ret.) to be the next U.S. Maritime Administrator. According to the press release from the White House, “Adm. Phillips is a leader in the field of coastal resilience and climate impact on national security at the regional, national and international level. In her current appointment as the first Special Assistant to the Governor of Virginia for Coastal Adaptation and Protection, she is building a collaborative, whole of government and community approach to address the impacts of coastal flooding across the Commonwealth, including the development of Virginia’s first Coastal Resilience Master Plan. In particular, she coordinates across Federal, State, local and other partners to create equitable strategies to address rising waters and climate impact to federal, maritime, and other critical coastal infrastructure assets in Virginia.”

Phillips served nearly 31 years on active duty prior to her current appointment. She received her commission through the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps upon graduation from the University of North Carolina in 1983. She served aboard two vessels—the USS Cape Cod and the USS San-Jose—during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. She was the first commanding officer aboard the USS Martin Johnson, the executive assistant to the 6th Fleet Commander. Phillips was involved in the deployment of goods in support of the Pakistani earthquake relief efforts. Prior to her retirement, she was commander of Expeditionary Strike Group Two, which included 14 vessels and 10 subordinate commands—all part of the Amphibious Expeditionary Forces along the U.S. East Coast. Phillips retired from the Navy in 2014.

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 available at: https://www.seafarers.org/news/labor-maritime/other.Form.forms. The forms are also available under “SIU Forms” in the “ABOUT tab.

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Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost Takes Command

C. U.S. Transportation Command

Gen. Van Ovost expressed her appreciation, and thanked Lyons for his leadership and service. “We are grateful to have had under your command and to have taken part in your legacy,” she said. “It is an honor of a lifetime to be selected to lead the United States Transportation Command as we prepare to meet the challenges of tomorrow, today. Together, we will deliver.”
The American maritime industry is ramping up efforts to promote workplace environments that are safe for everyone.

Those joint endeavors involve the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Maritime Administration, U.S.-flag vessel operators, public and private maritime schools, maritime unions and other organizations.

As previously reported, in late September 2021, an anonymous member of the class of 2022 at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) at Kings Point, New York, submitted an account detailing her alleged sexual assault during her Sea Year. According to her writing, she was raped by the first engineer aboard her vessel (who was her supervisor as a member of the engine department).

The anonymous victim’s report is posted online on the website of the organization Maritime Legal Aid and Advocacy. She describes sexual harassment as a common occurrence among the female students at King’s Point. A sexual alleged victim posted a similar account a few weeks after the initial one appeared online.

Subsequent, ongoing investigations by the DOT and USMMA (and others) are aimed at pinpointing the scope and cause of the harassment, reviewing corrective action. In the interim, the USMMA “Sea Year” program has been suspended indefinitely.

The SIU and its affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education (PHC) have not been implicated in any of the allegations, but both the union and the school are actively working to shore up safety for everyone. Their joint efforts include conducting an anonymous, electronic sexual assault/sexual harassment (SASH) survey at the school; circulating a SASH flyer from the U.S. Coast Guard’s Investigative Service; developing a new SASH brochure; participating in industry-wide meetings (some of which have included DOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg and DOT Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg); and reviewing the school’s SASH policy.

The SIU also teamed up with other unions in issuing a letter to their respective members in late October. Signing the communication were SIU President Michael Sacco, American Maritime Officers President Paul DeFlé, MEBIA President Adam Vokac, MM&P President Don Marcus, SUP President Dave Connolly, MFOW President Anthony Poplawski and ARA President Kelly Anderson.

The letter reads: “As you know, our industry recently made numerous headlines due to allegations of sexual assault and alcohol consumption aboard an American-flag vessel. We take the incident with utmost seriousness, but, regardless of how that particular case plays out, the unsigned unions – who represent the majority of deep-sea U.S. mariners – are taking this opportunity to reinforce our collective commitment to help ensure that all seafarers have a safe workplace free of fear, harassment, bullying and any form of violence.

“Over the last few years, we have collectively re-examined and, where warranted, updated poli- cies and practices to ensure that all seafarers work in a safe, healthy and violence-free workplace. But there is always more we can do. That is why we are committed to working with the Maritime Administration to ensure that our industry’s increased efforts to ensure safety and security of seafarers, including the safety and fair treatment of every member.

“Each of our organizations is committed to ensuring the safety and fair treatment of every member. Realizing we are dealing with a social problem that can be magnified aboard ship, every member must share the commitment to speak out and act when they observe shipboard bullying, harass- ment, discrimination, or assault.

“We know that our members are professionals, and that the overwhelming majority of U.S. Merchant Mariners are decent folks who work hard to make a living in a unique environment. We are often in leadership positions aboard ship. Our personal example and insistence on the safety and re- spectful treatment of our shipmates is the essence of leadership. Whatever the rating, experience, or qualifications, a good shipmate protects their co-workers and does not toler- ate any forms of abuse.

“During the November SIU membership meeting in Piney Point, Sacco and SIU Executive Vice President Auguste Tellez encouraged Seafarers to treat each other with respect and protect one another like family, whether aboard ship, at the hiring halls, at the PHC or elsewhere ashore.

“The Sea Year program in particular has gotten the atten- tion of Congress. On Oct. 29, six members (all Democrats) wrote to Buttigieg calling for remediation. Signing the let- ter were Reps. Peter DeFazio, Adam Smith, Joe Courtney, Maria Cantwell, Jackie Speier, and Sadah Carbajal.

“The letter in part said: ‘We are very concerned with the recent allegations of sexual assault by a female cadet at the United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) during her Sea Year experience in 2019. This brave female cadet not only shared her story on the terrible circumstance she endured while at sea, but also detailed alarming statistics regarding the number of other female cadets within her class who have also been harassed and assaulted…. In 2016, the Department of Transportation stood down the Sea Year program to implement changes to better protect students. But those changes clearly did not work, and we are con- cerned that the cadets remain in danger.”

They recommended suspending the Sea Year program for the current term and added, “Prior to the resumption of Sea Year, we request that USMMA develop a public written plan that includes detailed steps that will be taken to ensure the safety of cadets at sea. While we understand the importance of a timely graduation for USMMA cadets, the safety of those same cadets should be your top concern. We stand ready to assist the Department in ensuring a complete educational experience and a timely graduation.”

“ITF, Maritime Must Be Safe for Women

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), to which the SIU is af- filiated, recently weighed in on the mari- time industry’s increased efforts to ensure safe workplaces.

In early November, the federation issued a statement that read in part: “A brave female cadet recently published the horrific experiences of sexual assault she faced while attending the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. The incident and response to it details brings shame on the shipping industry and underlines the urgent need for action to eliminate violence in the workplace.”

“Eliminating violence in the work- place requires action from employers, employees, and governments, since it is everyone’s responsibility to ensure the safety and security of seafarers, including women seafarers,” she said.

“Her online post the cadet revealed the full horror of the incident that occurred on board a Maersk Line vessel while she was driving her year at sea in 2019. Going public prompted an independent inquiry from A.P. Moller-Maersk, and investiga- tions by the Maritime Administration of the U.S. Federal Department of Transportation. “But we cannot leave it there. Policies need action.”

Lena Dyring, women’s representative from the ITF Seafarers’ Section, stated, “Sadly, this is not an isolated incident, but a reality for many seafarers, both male and female, regardless of flag or company. We know that women’s experiences in the shipping industry, ashore and at sea often do not match the best intentions laid out in policies. Although many women sea- farer trainees have great support during their education ashore, including as part of mentoring programs, it is an all-too-common experience that too many women seafarers suffer from harassment and bul- lying. Too many encounter discrimination in the workplace, and in the worst cases, assault.”

Dyring said everyone in maritime has a responsibility to change the male-domi- nated culture and remove obstacles and barriers faced by women in the indus- try. Dyring also revealed that following a recent publication of an ITF statement denouncing an assault on a female ITF inspector, she received a letter from a woman seafarer that contained a strong message to the industry “that is worth am- plifying.”

“IN the letter, the seafarer argues that ‘violence is NOT the only reason why the maritime industry cannot retain more women.’ She suggests that it can be more difficult for women to advance their care- ers.

Dying said, “She is absolutely right that positive contribution of women at sea need to be celebrated and profiled. To- gether, we can make a career at sea safe. We can make it a secure place for every- one, including women, so that all seafarers can progress and achieve their full poten- tial.”

In 2020, women made up 1.28% of the overall global seafaring workforce.

The ITF will soon be publishing its own support materials for women sea- farers, and will be specifically includ- ing guidance on seafarers’ rights to safe, healthy and violence-free work- places.
ABOARD USNS GUADALUPE -- In photo at left, SIU CIVMAR (and ship’s delegate) Sharon Hill (center) meets with SIU Asst. VP Joe Vincenzo (right) and SIU Representative Jesse Ruth. Additional CIVMARS are pictured directly above, also with the union officials.

ABOARD USNS MIGUEL KEITH -- CIVMARS and union officials are pictured earlier this year on the West Coast. SIU VP Nick Celona is third from right in the back row. SIU Assi. VP Joe Vincenzo is standing at far right, while SIU Representative Jesse Ruth is standing second from left.

FOURTH ARM OF DEFENSE -- SIU VP Nick Celona (right) meets with members of the 23rd Marine Regiment in San Bruno, California, on Nov. 2. Celona discussed the vital link between the armed forces and the U.S. Merchant Marine. Sgt. Samuel Tena is at left.

ABOARD USNS MERCY -- CIVMARS and SIU officials meet aboard the hospital ship in San Diego.

ABOARD USNS BYRD -- CIVMAR Tommy Chin (right in photo at left) signs in SIU Government Services Division Representative Jesse Ruth. Chin has been with MSC for 52 years. Other crew members (and Ruth) are pictured above.