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Oiler *USNS Robert F. Kennedy* Christened

The Military Sealift Command's (MSC) newest fleet replenishment oiler – *USNS Robert F. Kennedy* – signifies new jobs for CIVMARS from the SIU Government Services Division, following its Oct. 28 christening.

The *Kennedy* was built and christened at General Dynamics NASSCO, a union shipyard in San Diego.

Attendees at the ceremony included U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro, U.S. Rep. Darelle Issa, U.S. Rep. Sara Jacobs, civil rights activist Dolores Huerta, numerous Navy officers, as well as executives and employees of NASSCO and members of the Kennedy family.

"When we christen this ship, we are recognizing the tenacity and the spirit of Robert Kennedy," said Pelosi.

The ship honors Robert F. Kennedy, an American lawyer and politician who served as the 64th United States Attorney General from January 1961 to September 1964, during his brother John F. Kennedy's presidency. He advocated for the civil rights movement, fought against organized crime and the Mafia, and played a vital role in U.S. foreign policy related to Cuba. Following his tenure as Attorney General, he served as a U.S. Senator from New York. In 1968, Robert Kennedy was considered a frontrunner for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. During a campaign event in Los Angeles, in June of that year, he was assassinated.

"Like the other great American leaders honored by the ships of this class, Robert F. Kennedy contributed much to the freedoms we enjoy today," said MSC Executive Director Steven Cade during the christening. "He was a champion of equality who sought to eliminate disparity and close opportunity gaps that plagued our nation during his lifetime. We are very proud to be associated with and eagerly look forward to sailing a ship in his name."

The ship was officially christened when Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Robert Kennedy's oldest child and vessel sponsor, broke the ceremonial bottle of champagne against the ship's hull.

"The Navy is a fighting force and a force for peace," said Kennedy Townsend. "It is fitting that the Secretary of the Navy named a class of ship after civil rights leaders like my father."

The 746-foot *Kennedy* is the fourth ship in the John Lewis-class previously known as the TAO(X).



The vessel is christened at General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego, a union shipyard. (Photo by Sarah Cannon)

CIVMARS Honored by United Seamen's Service

CIVMARS from the SIU Government Services Division were among the honorees at the most recent Admiral of the Ocean Seas (AOTOS) awards ceremony, which took place Dec. 1 in New York City.

Crew members and officers from the replenishment oiler *USNS John Lewis* were recognized for rescuing a boater who'd been stranded at sea for five days off the coast of Southern California. SIU members from the NY Waterway ferry *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, and from the roll-on/roll-off ship *Midnight Sun* (TOTE) also earned awards for separate rescues.

Receiving the primary AOTOS honors were Pasha Group President and CEO George Pasha IV; Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association President Adam Vokac; and Interlake Maritime Services President Mark W. Barker.

SIU personnel in attendance included President David Heindel, Executive Vice President Augie Tellez, Secretary-Treasurer Tom Orzechowski, Vice President Contracts George Tricker, Vice President West Coast Nick Marrone, Vice President Atlantic Coast Joseph Soresi, Vice President Government Services Nicholas Celona, Vice President Lakes and Inland Waters Bryan Powell, Assistant Vice President Pat Vandegrift, Norfolk Port Agent Mario Torrey, Philadelphia Port Agent Joe Baselice, Jersey City Port Agent Ray Henderson, Patrolman Osvaldo Ramos, and Manpower Director Mark von Siegel.

"We could not be more proud of our CIVMARS and other SIU members who were duly recognized for their heroic efforts," Celona stated.

Pasha, whose company employs numerous SIU members, said in part, "We need additional investment in training and schooling of our mariner workforce, including funding for high school and pre-high school programs. We need to lower barriers for entry for our seafarers and to allow for our service members to transition into commercial roles more easily. It is crucial for this administration to communicate the significance and value of these well-paying jobs and to actively support the unions and employers in recruiting and retaining these essential positions."

He added, "We extend our gratitude to our hard-working mariners who tirelessly carry out heroic duties to ensure the ships remain safe and reliably on time. We also honor the work of United Seamen's Service in providing comfort and assistance to our mariners worldwide."

As previously reported, the *Roosevelt* crew helped rescue hundreds of passengers from a Staten Island Ferry boat that had caught fire; and, the *Midnight Sun* crew quickly extinguished a shipboard fire.

The AOTOS awards recognize mariners of vessels who, during the previous year, exhibited exceptional bravery, superb seamanship and devotion to duty while engaged in operations at sea, according to the United Seamen's Service.

Rear Adm. Phillip Sobeck, Commander, Military Sealift Command, served as the principal speaker for the event. He stated, "To the crew of MSC's very own *USNS John*

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President's Column

Stick Together to Boost Manpower

For the SIU, one of the biggest stories of 2023 was the union's tireless efforts to recruit new people into our industry, both in the Government Services Division and in the private sector.

This is a multi-faceted challenge, but we have made tangible progress, including a recent legislative gain – and a related upcoming tweak of the apprentice program in Piney Point – that will facilitate sailing in entry-level jobs as well as upgrading to ratings. We'll share more details in the months ahead, but this is a big win.

While I am confident in saying the SIU has worked exhaustively and transparently to boost and retain manpower, I am concerned that some of our allies are trying to move in different directions to solve the problem. It's important that we work together as an industry – labor, management and government alike – in order to identify and implement the most effective, most sustainable answers for America and its current and future mariners.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't brainstorm for creative solutions, but there's nothing to be gained through catching people off-guard with public calls for steps that very well might weaken, rather than strengthen, the U.S. Merchant Marine. Our industry normally enjoys a well-earned reputation for being on the same page. We need to return to that standard.

Again, in the SIU we are taking steps in the right direction, and on that note, I thank our rank-and-file members for always stepping up to provide the best-trained, most reliable shipboard manpower. It's been a challenge lately from a sheer numbers standpoint, because of numerous activations, post-pandemic retirements and new entries into the Tanker Security Program, but you have answered the call.

As you all know, it's vitally important to take a job if you're in position to do so – not just for the immediate income and experience, but also to help ensure that your jobs are still there in the future. Our survival hinges on our dependability (along with grassroots political action, but that's a topic for another day). That's something to keep in mind the next time you're weighing whether or not to ship out.

Finally, I appreciate you continuing to do your part by promoting the industry and helping recruit future Seafarers, whether that's by word-of-mouth or (as numerous members have done) volunteering to assist at a career fair. Your efforts are making a difference. Please continue to help your union out where and when you can.

Safety First

As of this writing in mid-December, at least three foreign-flag merchant ships and one U.S. warship had been attacked by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea, according to the Pentagon. And, you may have read or heard about in-port protests on the West Coast that involved an SIU crewed vessel which may or may not have been carrying military cargo.

The bottom line is that this is the right moment to adhere to the World War II mantra, "Loose lips sink ships." These are emotionally and politically charged times. Please take every precaution in your communications to help ensure discretion and safety.



David Heindel

CIVMARS Honored in New York City

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Lewis, represented here tonight by the ship's master, Captain Dan Glazier, your quick and professional actions to rescue a sailboat and mariner adrift at sea for five days were consequential and lifesaving. You are an example of great Americans serving their nation, just as over 4,000 CIVMARS aboard MSC vessels are doing around the world every day."

Glazier said, "I'm glad we were in the area and were able to help."

The 746-foot *USNS John Lewis* is the first of the new John Lewis-class of fleet replenishment oilers, and one of MSC's newest ships, having been christened in 2021 and accepted into MSC's fleet in 2022, the agency reported. It has the ability to carry 162,000 barrels of diesel ship fuel, aviation fuel and dry stores cargo. The upgraded oiler was constructed with double hulls to protect against oil spills and strengthened cargo and ballast tanks.

Proceeds from the AOTOS event benefit USS community services abroad for the U.S. Merchant Marine, seafarers of all nations, and U.S. government and military personnel overseas.

A non-profit agency established in 1942, the USS operates centers in six foreign ports in Europe, Asia, and Africa and in the Indian Ocean, and also provides seagoing libraries to American vessels through its affiliate, the American Merchant Marine Library Association.



In attendance to help salute honorees are (from left) SIU VPs Nicholas Celona and Bryan Powell and SIU President David Heindel.

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SIU Directory

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George Tricker, Vice President Contracts

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Vice President Government Services

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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.

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Maritime Administrator Underscores Need to Boost Recruiting, Retention

During recent remarks delivered at an annual meeting of the American Bureau of Shipping, U.S. Maritime Administrator Ann Phillips emphasized the critical role of U.S. Merchant Mariners.

In a wide-ranging address that spelled out the administration’s multi-faceted pro-maritime strategy, Phillips spent significant time discussing American crews and also touched on the global manpower challenge.

Phillips said in part, “I have done a lot of international engagement over the last few months, meeting with leaders from the IMO, the UK, Vietnam and Korea. In all of these engagements the one consistent throughline that everyone spoke about was the critical nature of the mariner workforce and, more to the point, the mariner workforce shortage. For our part, the Maritime Administration is ... working to ... help recruit, train, and retain mariners by reducing barriers to entry.”

She added, “I am beginning to focus more keenly on quality of life for all mariners. Salaries for entry-level mer-

chant mariners are at an all-time high. However, despite the competitive pay, our industry continues to grapple with a mariner shortfall. While most acutely felt in the efforts to recruit and retain women – who are woefully underrepresented at about 8% of the maritime community – the downward trend in the number of mariners across all demographics, demands our attention. With that in mind, over the next several months I am going to focus on quality-of-life issues and work with industry on the sharing of best practices....

“I truly believe that to attract today’s workforce we must change the ‘way we have always done it.’ Mariners who want careers and families can indeed have both if a pathway is mapped out in an effective family policy and embraced by industry and labor.”

The administrator also provided an update on the agency’s work to develop a formal national maritime strategy, as directed by the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act. As previously reported, the Maritime Ad-



Maritime Administrator Ann Phillips

ministration chose the Center for Naval Analyses (CAN) “to identify and examine the key components of an enduring

national maritime strategy that may inform a national maritime strategy, that can be leveraged for decades to come,” Phillips said. “MARAD, working with CNA and numerous stakeholders from across government, industry, labor, academia, and other partners will identify the commercial sealift requirements to meet our nation’s future economic and security needs, identify shortfalls and challenges in current capabilities that need to be addressed, and provide MARAD with options to address any shortfalls in capacity and capability from which we then develop our strategy. This includes addressing any shortfalls in the areas of focus I mentioned earlier such as our strained workforce and the modest presence of U.S.-flag commercial ships in international trade.”

Moreover, Phillips said the agency “has developed a five-year strategic Mariner Workforce Development Plan to recruit, train, and retain merchant mariners.... We are close to a release date on this report, and it will be posted on MARAD’s website.”

Biden to Use Trade Pacts, Leverage to Advance Worker Rights Worldwide

Building on the provisions of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA), the Biden administration recently launched a whole-of-government initiative, via an executive order to use trade pacts and other leverage to advance worker rights worldwide.

Biden’s objective, said Secretary of State Antony Blinken, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, is to expand and increase worker rights and incomes abroad. When those rights advance and incomes advance, those workers benefit – and U.S. workers do, too, the three said.

That’s because advancing workers’ rights and wages abroad also removes low-wage exploitation, which many businesses commonly use to export U.S. jobs and undercut U.S. workers, the officials said.

“In support of workers and our national security interests, my administration will consider actions to integrate and elevate workers’ rights and the promotion of high labor standards in our foreign, international development, trade, climate, and global economic policy priorities,” Biden’s executive order declares.

Biden’s order supersedes more corporate-leaning trade policies, some of which date back to the Gilded Age, which heavily rely on foreign labor to produce U.S. goods. These policies often came at a great cost to laborers in “opening markets,” many of whom suffered abuse and repression. Some examples include NAFTA, USMCA’s predecessor, which passed in spite of strong union opposition.

Now, Biden is pivoting the government in a pro-worker direction, and that drew cheers from the AFL-CIO. Its then-top trade expert, Deputy Chief of Staff Thea Lee, led the crafting of tough, enforceable worker

rights into the USMCA during the Trump presidency. Legislative directors from the Steelworkers, the Auto Workers and the Teamsters helped.

Labor then worked with U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, (D-Conn.) and other pro-worker lawmakers, to ensure those tough standards remained and the USMCA passed. Tai noted it’s led to large growth in Mexico in both independent unions – as opposed to company and pro-government unions – and rising wages there, notably in the auto industry.

With that as a model, as Tai and Su pointed out, Biden’s executive order framework “will reshape how U.S. government agencies conduct international diplomacy by putting workers’ rights and standards at the center,” AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler said.

“Across the globe, working people are united in our fight against growing corporate overreach and abuse, low wages, attacks on organizing, the absence of strong benefits, and poor working conditions. This new strategy is a major victory for workers everywhere and underscores workers’ rights are essential to our country’s national and foreign policy, and national and economic security.”

Shuler added, “This framework will leverage diplomacy to promote internationally recognized labor rights and worker organizing; create measures that enable swift responses to violence and threats against trade union leaders, activists and organizations; improve the capacity of U.S. agencies and foreign missions to engage with workers and their representatives to improve the lives of working people; and enhance and enforce fair trade practices. The directive recognizes that no matter where we live, all workers deserve dignity and respect on the

job. We need a global economy that puts working people at the center.”

During a ceremony in San Francisco where the executive order was announced, and with many union members in attendance, Su (a Californian) said, “Every worker deserves a just day’s pay for a hard day’s work. Every worker should come home healthy and safe at the end of the day. And every worker should have a right to join a union. These are not just American values. They apply to workers around the world. And in President Biden’s America, we want to lead by example.”

Su also warned that the executive order to all federal agencies to push worker rights worldwide, together, isn’t enough. “Corporations are global. So, workers, and worker power, and the way we think about workers have to be global, as well,” she explained. “When some corporations cut corners and contract out work to low-road businesses that exploit workers around the world, it creates an unfair playing field for every responsible business that does right by its workers. When global actors are allowed to evade labor laws in one country by exploiting workers in another part of the world, this undermines workers’ rights everywhere. And when workers are harassed, discriminated against, and attacked as they produce things sold all around the world, we cannot simply look away and ignore the ways our global economy brings with it global responsibility.”

Blinken outlined practical moves to enforce worker rights worldwide, besides using trade pacts as leverage. They include “engaging governments, workers, unions, civil society and the private sector to protect and promote internationally recognized labor rights.” He’s ordering ambassadors to “engage with workers, with unions so their voices are reflected in everything that we do.

Union Hosts Pro-Maritime Legislators



The new-look hiring hall in Norfolk, Virginia, served as a distinguished but still down-to-earth setting for a recent gathering of Seafarers, representatives from various unions – and two prominent politicians from the Commonwealth. U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine (D) and U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott (D) headlined the Nov. 20 meeting of the Hampton Roads Ports Maritime Council (part of the Maritime Trades Department). Both are longtime friends of the SIU, backers of the U.S. Merchant Marine, and supporters of workers’ rights. They took part in a question-and-answer luncheon as the council conducted its first in-person meeting since the pandemic. Kaine is pictured at right in photo at right, with SIU members John Morrison and Pinero Peek. Scott is at right in the other photo, with SIU Port Agent Mario Torrey.



Seafarer Snapshots from the Fleet



SIU Asst. VP Joe Vincenzo (second from left) and SIU Representative Sam Spain (right) meet with CIVMARS on the East Coast.



SIU VP Government Services Nicholas Celona (fourth from left) attends the 248th birthday celebration of the U.S. Marine Corps in San Jose, California, along with other guests.



SIU Representative Sam Spain (standing at right) and SIU Asst. VP Joe Vincenzo (behind the lens) meet with CIVMARS aboard the *USNS Robert Peary*. Vessel is pictured below.



SIU Representative Jesse Ruth (left) confers with new CIVMAR Samella Sutton in San Diego.

