



Working to Secure MEBA's Future

It has been an exciting finish to a productive year for both the MEBA and America's Merchant Marine. After intensive lobbying efforts for a new and improved MSP, MEBA was honored to attend a bill signing ceremony with President Bush to mark the passage into law of a new Maritime Security Program.

The value of a secure and committed MSP was highlighted by the recent sealift success of Operation Iraqi Freedom manned by many mariners who rely on MSP for peacetime employment aboard U.S. flag vessels. MEBA was part of a broad coalition of maritime labor and ship owners and operators who sensed the timing was right and worked tirelessly in getting approval of new legislation to expand and extend the Maritime Security Program ensuring a ready supply of U.S. vessels and American crews for national emergencies or war.

The new 10-year extension lengthens the program to 2015. Although the current MSP is set to expire in 2005, lawmakers

were eager to see MSP renewed this year to provide stability and continuity to this valuable national defense asset. In addition to extending the program, the legislation calls for an increase from the current 47 participating vessels to 60 commercial and militarily useful U.S.-flagships. Importantly, the new MSP calls for an escalation in payment amounts starting at \$2.6 million per vessel in fiscal year 2005 and rising to \$3.1 million per vessel for fiscal years 2012 -2015. Under the current MSP, payments have been fixed at \$2.1 million per vessel.

I want to thank our supporters on Capitol Hill and the Administration for their hard work and foresight in extending an indispensable and powerful maritime and national security program. I especially appreciate the opportunity to have testified before Congress last year on the value of an early renewal of this pillar of maritime policy and the importance of securing consistent and stable peacetime employment for America's mariners. Members of the MEBA serve proudly on

40 of the 47 vessels currently in the program, and I testified that any renewal must safeguard those positions. This program does that.

MSP is just one facet of strengthening MEBA and the Merchant Marine. One of the other initiatives the Union is pursuing is the development of a Short Sea Shipping system, a project spearheaded by Maritime Administrator Capt. Bill Schubert. This unique solution would significantly expand waterborne alternatives by launching a coastal cargo carriage system. Not only would it help alleviate the nightmare of highway congestion that is expected to double over the next two decades, it would pry open a number of coastwise shipping opportunities for U.S. mariners. Along with recent MEBA organizing successes, the further promotion of our Union with potential employers is paramount to achieving true maritime security.

Finally, I would like to note the recent retirement of George Clements, who has anchored the staff at Headquarters over the last decade. George first joined the MEBA in 1964 and his 39-year run as an engineer, instructor, Union official and attorney has proven invaluable for the success of the MEBA. He also helped the Union maintain continuity and stability throughout his years at Headquarters. Good luck to George, we will certainly miss him.

Seasons Greetings to All!

Ron Davis

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Longtime member and official George Clements was honored in a small reception at the School, the same day as the groundbreaking for the new Merchant Marine Memorial. Left to right is Atlantic Coast V.P. Don Keefe, George Clements, President Ron Davis, Instructor Richard Thek (behind Ron), Instructor H. Truitt ("Tru") Sunderland, and Executive V.P. Bud Jacque.

