AMERICA'S SHIPYARDS

The state of American shipbuilding is a noteworthy example of the effects of government policy.

While we in the MTD remain justifiably proud of the outstanding work performed by union shipyard employees, the worldwide shipbuilding statistics are sobering. Only one-third of a percent of the world's ships carry the "Made in the USA" label. By contrast, China produces around 40 percent, while Korea and Japan account for 25 percent each.

The main reason for that disparity is straightforward. The U.S. eliminated its construction differential subsidy program in 1981 but didn't attempt to secure any sort of reciprocity from other shipbuilding nations. Asian yards, buoyed by billions of dollars in subsidies, took over the global market. It only took a little more than a decade for America to go from being the biggest commercial shipbuilder in the world to no longer producing any vessels for international trade.

All of that said, things are hardly hopeless. We still have more than 100 shipyards in the U.S., most of them smaller facilities but all crewed by capable, well-trained employees, many of whom belong to unions, including MTD affiliates. In particular, union yards in Philadelphia and San Diego in recent years have constructed some of the world's most modern, state-of-the-art tonnage, including tankers, containerships, and container/roll-on, roll-off vessels. But those ships are for the Jones Act trade, which largely has been recapitalized. In order to truly bounce back, our shipyards need a commitment from the federal government and a solid plan to rebuild the Navy. Bringing back a modern version of the construction subsidy program also would help level the playing field for securing contracts to build commercial vessels for global trading.

In the interim, America would benefit by taking better advantage of the Title XI Shipbuilding Loan Guarantee Program. According to the U.S. Maritime Administration, Title XI "provides for a full faith and credit guarantee by the United States Government to promote the growth and modernization of the

United States Government to promote the growth and modernization of the U.S. merchant marine and U.S. shipyards. The program… provides U.S. Government guaranteed debt issued by (1) U.S. or foreign shipowners for the purpose of financing or refinancing either U.S.-flag vessels or eligible export vessels constructed, reconstructed or reconditioned in U.S. shipyards and (2) U.S. shipyards for the purpose of financing advanced shipbuilding technology and modern shipbuilding technology of a privately owned, general shipyard facility located in the U.S."

Title XI is not a subsidy program and it has been under-utilized for too long. Studies have shown that for every dollar invested in the program, $20 worth of economic activity is generated.

America's shipbuilding capability, like other parts of the maritime industry, is vital to national, economic and homeland security. That's why the MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils believe it is of utmost priority to promote, protect and grow United States shipyards from coast to coast to coast. To do otherwise is to risk eventual full dependence on foreign countries both for the nation's commercial trade and, more importantly, supporting the troops. Those risks are obvious and unacceptable. We need to do something about it.

CARGO PREFERENCE

Every year, attacks on the numerous programs that support and protect the U.S.-flag maritime industry spring up like perennial flowers. One regular attack comes from those who seek to tear down the programs that make up cargo preference.

In brief, cargo preference programs require shippers to use U.S.-flag vessels to move specified government-impelled, ocean-borne goods. The most often cited program is PL-480, otherwise known as Food for Peace.

Enacted in 1954, Food for Peace sends American-grown food, dry goods and other commodities aboard U.S.-crewed, U.S.-flag ships to countries with dire nutritional needs. Those packages, marked “USAID from the American people,” help nourish those at risk of starvation while spreading a message of American goodwill to the most impoverished countries on Earth.

Just last year, Food for Peace reached tens of millions of people in 55 countries, moving almost 2.5 million metric tons of food assistance and relief. The value of that effort totaled $4.3 billion, and it went directly to those who are in desperate need of aid – people in Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia, to name some of those who received the assistance.

When faced with these attacks, it helps to have tough allies. Cargo preference has scores of supporters from both political parties serving in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. In that regard, the maritime industry could hardly ask for better friends.

In December, U.S. Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) introduced H.R. 742, which recognizes the continued success of the Food for Peace Act. The purpose of the resolution commends “the Federal Food for Peace program, recognizing the ongoing humanitarian need in conflict areas around the globe, and calling for the continued prioritization of funding for Food for Peace programs.”

“Hunger is a corrosive force in so many developing parts of our world. It both causes and worsens conflict, and it disproportionately affects children,” said Costa, who chairs the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture. “For more than 60 years, Food for Peace has worked in conflict areas to ensure affected communities can recover and rebuild their self-reliance. I am proud to join my colleagues in introducing this resolution and calling attention both to the wonderful work that Food for Peace has done, and the challenges we still must overcome.”

When we say cargo preference, we’re not just talking about Food for Peace. The Cargo Preference Act of 1904 dictates that 100 percent of military cargo be shipped aboard U.S.-flag vessels; and Public Resolution 17 from 1934 states all cargo generated by the U.S. Export-Import Bank be carried aboard U.S.-flag ships unless granted a waiver by the U.S. Maritime Administration.

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils will continue to advocate for the expansion of the nation’s current cargo preference laws, which will help ensure that American mariners keep working aboard U.S.-flag ships around the world.

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL ACT

After a 75-year fight, the U.S. Merchant Mariners of World War II will finally get some of the recognition they deserve.

Earlier this month, Congress passed the Merchant Mariners of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2020.

The legislation, originally sponsored in the House by Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) and in the upper chamber by Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), authorizes the creation of a gold medal to honor the Word War II Merchant Mariners. The medal would be displayed in the American Merchant Marine Museum at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in New York. Duplicates then would be struck and made available to the public.

Senator Murkowski stated, “Despite their loyalty and patriotic services and commitment to the United States, our World War II Merchant Mariners didn’t receive their veteran status until nearly 40 years after the war had ended. The U.S. Merchant Marine provided crucial services during World War II by transporting soldiers, tanks, airplanes, ammunition, fuel, and food to aid soldiers on the front lines. This legislation recognizes the unsung heroes of the World War II conflict, for their loyalty and bravery, as they risked their lives to keep the Allied troops properly equipped. I’m thankful my Senate colleagues recognize the importance of honoring the brave U.S. Merchant Mariners for their pivotal role in our nation’s history and their efforts in defense of freedom.”

“Throughout the Second World War, our armed forces relied on the U.S. Merchant Marine to ferry supplies, cargo and personnel into both theaters of operation, and they paid a heavy price in service to their country,” said Garamendi. “These mariners put their lives on the line for this country, braving German and Japanese submarines in their Liberty Ships as they delivered critical supplies to our service members in the European and Pacific theaters. Unfortunately, their sacrifice is commonly overlooked.”

Despite seeing action and danger across the globe before and during the war, merchant mariners were excluded for any type of veterans' status until 1988. Even then, mariners received a fraction of what others who served during World War II obtained. Merchant mariners suffered a casualty rate higher than every other branch of the service except the Marine Corps during the war. There are approximately 4,000 WWII Merchant Mariners still alive today.

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils wholeheartedly support the recognition of the mariners who bravely served in World War II, and applaud the efforts of our allies on Capitol Hill who worked tirelessly to ensure this legislation finally became law. The MTD also salutes the valiant campaign waged by the American Merchant Marine Veterans to safely steer this legislation to port.

GET OUT THE VOTE

Elections have consequences.

That has been so very evident since the last presidential election four years ago. The United States has been rocked as if it was a ship trying to navigate the North Atlantic in the midst of a winter gale.

Ballots cast (and not cast) for candidates at the local, state and federal levels have determined spending priorities that have directly affected how and where workers do their jobs while other factors have extended to the daily activities of our families.

Enacted tax cuts have not “trickled-down” to the average worker. Ignored have been much needed infrastructure repairs to ports, waterways, roads, utilities and rails. School buildings are crumbling while children within try to learn using outdated books. The information source for the future – the internet – still is not available to millions of households across the land because of either cost or access.

The Labor Movement has said enough is enough. Teachers and school personnel stood up to elected officials from West Virginia to Los Angeles demanding better conditions for students. Government employees from the local to the federal sectors are publicizing how they continue to try to serve the public with less and less. Communications Workers have gained legislation to save good call-center jobs in their communities instead of seeing them head overseas. Because of the 25-year grassroots efforts of our members, labor provisions were included in the new U.S.-Canada-Mexico trade agreement.

One recent example of election consequences can be seen in Virginia. In November 2019, voters flipped both the House of Delegates and Senate to worker friendly majorities. Labor issues long believed unattainable including a minimum wage increase, worker misclassification, pay raises for prison workers and public sector collective bargaining were seriously considered and, in some cases, passed during the recently completed 60-day session.

Union members got out the vote in 2019. They started seeing the changes in 2020.

That is why the MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils urge all of our members and their families to register and vote in this year's elections. Learn the issues; meet the candidates; discover who in your communities will stand up for working people and their causes. Then vote.

Party affiliation does not matter when the candidates are on our side. The time of standing back and letting others make decisions that will affect us tomorrow, next year, next decade is over.

From door-knocking to phone-calling, from speaking with co-workers to using social media, now is the time to get out our message and make sure our families, friends and neighbors get to the polls and vote for those who will place the issues of working people at the top of their agendas.

IN MEMORY OF FRANK PECQUEX

The MTD lost a good and dedicated friend last month.

Frank Pecquex passed away at the age of 75. He had been a fixture at these meetings going back to the 1980s.

After starting with the Seafarers in 1967, he became the legislative director for that union and the MTD beginning in 1985.

In 1991, Frank was promoted to MTD Administrator. Two years later, he became the Executive Secretary-Treasurer. He held that post for 18 years, until his retirement in 2011. He served as Executive Secretary-Treasurer longer than anyone else in our department's 74-year history.

Throughout his career, Frank always fought for the rights of workers. He never forgot that the money in the MTD's coffers came from union members' dues.

Frank was a great union brother and will be sorely missed.

PORTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The inland waterways of America signify an essential part of the economy, connecting manufacturers with distributors and farmers with exporters. But those goods can't make the journey on their own: The transit requires properly dredged ports, well-maintained locks, and, of course, U.S.-flag vessels and crews to navigate the waters.

One of the most important gateways to the domestic shipping industry, the Soo Locks, has received the funding authorization it needs to continue desperately needed repairs and redesign.

The Soo Locks, and in particular the 1,200-foot Poe Lock, handles up to 80 million tons of cargo annually. Approximately 90 percent of that cargo passes through the Poe Lock, which is the only lock that can handle 1,000-foot Lakers. The Soo Locks are critical to the movement of cargo on the Great Lakes, and the MTD applauds the successful effort to appropriate the necessary funds.

"We can now definitively say that there will be a new Soo Lock," said Jim Weakley, president of the Lake Carriers' Association, adding that the money will help the Army Corps of Engineers stay on schedule and within budget. The nearly $1 billion construction project could be finished as soon as 2027 or as late as 2030, the Army Corps said.

While a 1,200-foot lock is hard to overstate, it can be easy to forget the potential economic stall that lies below the waters. If the ports aren't properly dredged, the largest and most efficient vessels can't access the terminal, imposing a limit on the amount of cargo a port can unload. Unfortunately, the sheer number of ports and waterways that are in need of dredging is constantly climbing.

There are positive developments, not just for MTD affiliates but also for the country itself. For example, the Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Corporation recently won an $83 million contract for significant dredging projects in several

critical areas around the country. That's great news and serves as an example that, when the money starts flowing more freely, so too will the rivers that make up our nation's infrastructure.

As stated by David Simonelli, Great Lakes Dredge and Dock's President of Dredging, "Working on these projects allows Great Lakes to help strengthen the U.S. economy, infrastructure and further support the protection of our U.S. coast lines."

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils strongly support the allocation of funds for all of the nation's inland waterway projects, including rebuilding the Soo Locks and addressing critical dredging needs. We will continue to fight for the appropriation of these funds at all levels of government, and urge legislators to make these issues a top priority.

MARITIME SECURITY PROGRAM

One year ago, we called on Congress to not only fully fund the U.S. Maritime Security Program, but also extend it.

While it definitely wasn't a simple case of "ask and ye shall receive," before we rung in the new year, we celebrated what is arguably the biggest win for MSP since the program's founding in 1996. Specifically, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020 extends the MSP by 10 years, to the year 2035. In addition to the certainty of a long-term reauthorization, the MSP stipend was increased to $5.3 million per vessel per year in 2022, with gradual increases to $6.8 million in 2032. Without action, the existing statute would have reverted the MSP stipend to $3.7 million in Fiscal Year '22. And the program itself would have expired in 2025.

The legislation also provides a $5 million-per-vessel stipend for two cable installation vessels to enroll in a new Cable Security Fleet program. The MSP-like arrangement will establish a fleet of privately owned, commercially viable, U.S.-documented cable vessels to meet national security requirements related to the installation, maintenance, or repair of undersea cables.

Finally, the bill mandates a report on U.S.-flagged tanker vessel capacity from the Secretary of Defense. The report will be created in conjunction with the Secretary of Transportation and is intended to identify the capabilities of the United States to maintain adequate U.S.-flagged fuel tanker vessel capacity to support a full range of potential military operations.

A recent Government Accountability Office report on maritime stated the following: "Defense officials we interviewed and recent DOD needs assessments … raised some concerns about potential future gaps in certain situations. For example, the current U.S.-flag internationally trading fleet has six petroleum tankers – down from 36 in 1990 – and USTRANSCOM has estimated potential needs for 86 tankers to fulfill DOD sealift requirements

under the National Defense Strategy. Currently, according to USTRANSCOM officials we interviewed, U.S.-flag tankers and tankers flagged in other countries meet DOD needs, but these officials stated that access to allied foreign-flag petroleum tankers is increasingly uncertain in the current geo-political environment."

Collectively, this is a huge win for American maritime – and one that the MTD and our affiliates helped make possible.

The MSP is crucial to America's national security. It is a vital source of jobs for members of MTD affiliates. The program includes 60 privately owned, U.S.-flag commercial vessels with a high degree of military utility which are trading in U.S.-foreign commerce. Those ships are made available to the Department of Defense as needed. The fleet currently includes 34 containerships, 18 roll-on/roll-off vessels, 6 heavy-lift vessels, and 2 tankers.

As we've noted in years past, it would cost the government tens of billions of dollars to replicate what it receives through MSP and a related program for a relatively tiny fraction of that cost.

Meanwhile, the addition of the cable-ship program further boosts America's security while creating good jobs, and the viable possibility of a new tanker program is reason for even more optimism.

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils know better than to exhale for more than a moment, but these are big wins that deserve acknowledgment. We look forward to further strengthening America's maritime commitment.

PUERTO RICO RELIEF

As if the struggle to recover from the direct hits of hurricanes in 2017 was not bad enough, now the citizens of Puerto Rico are being rocked by earthquakes and aftershocks on a daily basis since the start of this year.

The hardest hit area is the southwestern corner of the commonwealth. Schools are destroyed, utilities are disrupted and residents fear living in their homes.

When the first word of the new disasters reached the United States, the unions of the MTD sprang into action. They coordinated relief drives among their members and friends on the mainland to get much needed supplies to members and communities in Puerto Rico. Affiliates including the American Federation of Teachers; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union, the International Association of Machinists, the Communications Workers of America, and the Seafarers International Union (just to name a few) organized efforts to get help to the island.

Just as following Hurricanes Irma, Jose and Maria, the MTD and our Port Maritime Councils across the United States and Canada didn't wait to be asked. Port Councils along the Gulf Coast purchased tents and supplies that were sent out of the ports of Houston and Jacksonville. The Delaware Valley Port Council in Philadelphia gathered food, provisions and tents donated by affiliates for shipment to San Juan. The other Port Councils have written checks to purchase tents and other badly needed items.

Coordinating distribution has been the newly activated Puerto Rico Ports Council. Under the leadership of Brother Amancio Crespo, a determined team of trade unionists has moved the relief supplies as soon as the containers hit the dock. From Longshoremen getting the boxes available to Teamsters hauling the containers to the group of unionists loading their personal pick-up trucks for delivery to staging sites and homes, the Labor Movement is getting the job done.

Behind all of this in making sure deliveries can be scheduled and tracked is the 100-year-old cabotage law of the United States – the Jones Act. The union-crewed fleet of U.S.-flag vessels and tug/barges bring daily reminders to the people of Puerto Rico that their fellow American citizens care and have not forgotten them. The Jones Act fleet reminds those who want to amend or kill the law that it is still vital.

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils will continue to help the citizens of Puerto Rico as they recover from these natural disasters. Know that you are our sisters and brothers.

The MTD also salutes the hard work of all the union members who have donated time, effort and supplies to help their fellow citizens.

RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE

"**R**aising the minimum wage is a critical and simple way to help repair an underlying weakness in our economy. It would boost consumer spending and increase the purchasing power of millions of low-wage workers."

Sound familiar?

This paragraph is taken directly from the "Raise the Minimum Wage" statement passed by this very body in 2014. At that time, the national minimum wage was $7.25 an hour. That hasn't changed in six years. In fact, the national minimum wage has not increased since the summer of 2009 – the longest period in American history in which the minimum wage has not gone up.

What has changed is the 2014 struggle was to increase the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour over three years. As we know, that legislation never passed. But, last year, the U.S. House of Representatives did approve a measure to increase the minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2025. That bill remains stuck in the U.S. Senate.

States and some localities are not waiting for Congress to act. So far, 29 states and the District of Columbia have increased their minimum wage above the federal standard. A few of these are in the process of reaching the $15 threshold.

When the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act established the first minimum wage of 25 cents an hour, it was to serve as "a floor below wages" to help reduce poverty and ensure economic growth across the workforce.

In today's economy where the gap between the richest and the poorest continues to widen, a stagnated minimum wage has held back millions from gaining financial stability. It is not unusual to find low-wage workers trying to juggle two or three jobs in order to have food and shelter for themselves and their families.

The MTD has joined with the rest of the Labor Movement in the fight to raise minimum wage as well as to provide workers with a “living wage.” In 2018, the living wage needed by a full-time worker to care for a family of four and live above the poverty line was $16.14 an hour.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, “The real value of the federal minimum wage has dropped 17 percent since 2009 and 31 percent since 1968. Workers earning the minimum wage today have $6,800 less per year [based on 2019 economic statistics] to spend on food, rent and other essentials than did their counterparts 50 years ago.”

Significantly, study after study has shown that in states that have raised their respective minimum wages, zero adverse effects were seen. Those economies grew and, contrary to repeated warnings for those determined to suppress wages, employment did not drop.

As we unanimously approved six years ago, the MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils remain firmly committed to backing efforts to raise the national minimum wage. We are convinced that a higher minimum wage is a needed step to help low-wage workers and reduce the wealth gap. Such an increase will stimulate consumer demand and help drive economic growth for all workers.

RETIREMENT SECURITY

One issue we are bound to hear discussed during this election season is the concern of having enough money for retirement.

Age doesn't matter. True, a 25-year-old may not be looking at retirement income the same way a 55-year-old would, but planning a secure future is something that affects everyone.

Until the 20th century, those working Americans who made it to retirement age survived on the goodwill of their families and communities. Few were lucky enough to have set aside any type of savings.

After decades of debate, President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal reforms finally brought Social Security to life in 1935 to provide income for the elderly. Never designed to be the sole provider for those who were beyond their working abilities, Social Security offered supplemental revenue.

Thanks to the struggles of union members following World War II, blue-collar workers gave up part of their contracted pay raises to invest in pensions for retirement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. recognized this when he said, "The Labor Movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old age pensions, government relief for the destitute, and above all new age levels that meant not mere survival but a tolerable life."

For many union members, multiemployer pension plans were devised. These programs typically covered highly mobile workers who moved from one employer to another, often for short periods of time. Some of the industries included transportation, building and construction, entertainment, retail and others. In these industries, the workers would belong to one union but have different employers throughout their careers. The average plan would have between 500 to 2,000 participants with between 20 to 40 contributing employers.

Pensions supplemented by Social Security and savings were considered a mainstay of the middle-class.

However, the financial downturns at the beginning of this century hit companies and workers hard. Industry deregulation, climate change and other factors led to companies merging or going out of business. Changes in the law allowed creative usage of bankruptcy by firms to discard their pension obligations. Therefore, fewer companies with downsized workforces were paying less into these plans.

While many of the nearly 1,400 multiemployer plans weathered these storms, just over 100 have not been as fortunate.

As we have heard from our affiliate, the Mine Workers, their program came very close to collapsing. The MTD joined with the rest of the AFL-CIO in the seven-year battle to protect the Mine Workers. Success came in December when the Bipartisan American Miners Act of 2019 was included in the appropriations bill passed by Congress and signed by the president.

Now, we turn our attention to other sisters and brothers who through no fault of their own have seen their multiemployer pension plans run near empty.

The AFL-CIO has endorsed passage of the Rehabilitation of Multiemployer Pensions Act, also known as the Butch Lewis Act. The bill addresses the multiemployer pension crisis facing more than one million Americans, serving as an important backstop to ensure that retirees do not lose the pensions they earned through decades of hard work.

The Butch Lewis Act would address the pension crisis by creating a new office within the Treasury Department called the Pension Rehabilitation Administration (PRA). The PRA would allow pension plans to borrow money needed to remain solvent and continue providing security for retirees and workers for the decades to come. In order to do this, the PRA would sell Treasury-issued bonds in the open market to large investors, such as financial firms. The PRA would then lend the money from the sale of bonds to the financially troubled pension plans with long-term, low-interest loans, buying time for the pension plans to continue providing benefits while refocusing their investments for long-term health.

The Butch Lewis Act awaits action by the U.S. Senate after being approved in the House of Representatives last summer. The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils join with the rest of the Labor Movement by supporting our sisters and brothers to call for passage of the Butch Lewis Act.

SUPPORT THE JONES ACT

The Merchant Marine Act of 1920, also known as the Jones Act, is the nation's freight cabotage law that requires ships moving cargo between two points in the United States to be built, crewed, flagged and owned American. In its 100 years of service, the Jones Act time and again has proven its value as an indispensable law that benefits American workers and the American economy.

The Jones Act enjoys bipartisan support and is widely recognized as vital to U.S. national, economic and homeland security.

Congress in 2015, with its passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), championed what may have been its soundest statement of support for the Jones Act and the U.S.-flag industry in recent history.

The NDAA branded both the Jones Act and the American domestic maritime industry as essential to "the national security and economic vitality of the United States and the efficient operation of the United States transportation system." Similar sentiments last year repeatedly were echoed on Capitol Hill during congressional meetings and hearings, as well as around the country during formal maritime events and ship christenings. Support came not only from industry leaders but also legislators from both sides of the aisle as well as cabinet members.

In a 2019 study for the Transportation Institute titled "Contributions of the Jones Act Shipping Industry to the U.S. Economy," PricewaterhouseCoopers found that the law helps maintain around 650,000 American jobs while contributing billions of dollars each year to the U.S. economy. Another benefit that shouldn't be overlooked is that the Jones Act helps maintain a pool of well-trained, reliable, U.S. citizen mariners available to sail on American-flag military support ships during times of crisis.

If the foregoing is not enough, the Jones Act also provides other unseen, yet essential, plusses. Included are border protection, homeland security and the prevention of illegal immigration.

Despite the robust Congressional endorsements, complemented by the backing of others inside and outside of government, the Jones Act still regularly comes under attack. Today, the law remains in the crosshairs of countless opponents including the Cato Institute, which has been sponsoring a so-called “Project on Jones Act Reform,” the Heritage Foundation and the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii. The Jones Act arguably is the most scrutinized maritime-related legislation in the history of our country.

Just before Christmas, U.S. Rep. Ed Case (D-HI) introduced three bills in Congress to modify the Jones Act, erroneously saying that the law is “one of the key drivers of our astronomically high cost of living in Hawaii and other locations in our country that are not part of the continental U.S.”

Another attack on the Jones Act came two months ago when a contingent in the West Virginia House of Delegates sponsored House Concurrent Resolution 9, urging the Congress to repeal the Jones Act. Such a repeal threatens not only some 3,300 West Virginia jobs related to the Jones Act, but also businesses that rely on transportation on the state’s rivers and waterways.

Of course, we in the MTD are not fooled by any of the Jones Act critics. We know that nearly 100 countries around the world maintain some sort of cabotage laws. We know our own military leaders emphatically support the law. We’ve seen the devastating consequences in countries like Australia when cabotage has been eroded or eliminated. And we know not to let down our guard as we continue defending this venerable law.

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils remain fully committed to backing the Jones Act as well as other cabotage laws enacted around the world.

SUPPORT THE PRO ACT

During the Great Depression, American workers suffered at a rate that has not been seen since. Unemployment reached 25 percent of the workforce. Those lucky enough to have a job wondered daily if it would still be there. Safety conditions barely existed. Pay was whatever you could get. Unions struggled to get recognition.

With the 1932 election of Franklin Roosevelt as president, his administration set out to create a “New Deal” for all Americans. Among the measures endorsed by the president and passed by Congress was the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935.

The NLRA – also known as the Wagner Act – guaranteed private sector workers the right to organize, conduct collective bargaining and engage in collective action such as strikes. With this newfound protection, workers joined unions by the tens of thousands. At its height, nearly one of every three workers belonged to a union.

Of course, it didn’t take long for the enemies of working people to fight back. Despite being vetoed by President Harry Truman, Congress in 1947 passed the Taft-Hartley Act to roll back the ability of unions to organize and strike. Twelve years later, Congress approved even more restrictions with the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959.

Since then have come judicial decisions, executive orders and other actions to further handcuff the ability of workers to organize and bargain collectively.

The Labor Movement hasn’t taken this lying down. Legislative efforts to restore some of what was taken away were proposed and debated during the Carter and Obama administrations to no avail.

But “the times, they are a-changin’.” During the last decade, union members and their supporters used their votes to beat back attacks in Ohio, Missouri,

Virginia and elsewhere. Grassroots action by teachers, government employees, communications workers and others are succeeding.

Now, Congress is taking action.

Last month, the House of Representatives passed – with bipartisan support – the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. As AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka noted upon its passage: “Make no mistake, this is the most significant step Congress has taken to strengthen labor laws in the United States in 85 years and a win for workers everywhere.”

The PRO Act would modernize the NLRA by bringing remedies in line with other workplace laws. It would impose stronger solutions when an employer interferes with worker rights. It would call for fines for NLRA violations. It would require the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to go to court for an injunction to reinstate workers if the NLRB believes they illegally have been retaliated against for union activities.

Even though current labor law calls for employers to bargain in good faith when workers choose to be represented by a union, employers in most cases find a way to drag out the bargaining process to avoid reaching an agreement. The PRO Act would establish a timely process for gaining a first contract – including mediation and, if needed, binding arbitration. The bill would permit unions and employers to reach a “fair share” clause requiring all workers covered by collective bargaining to contribute a fair share towards the cost of bargaining and administering the agreement in all 50 states.

The PRO Act would deal with worker misclassification to tighten the definitions of independent contractor and supervisor, making sure that eligible workers can organize if they so choose. The bill also would prohibit employers from permanently replacing strikers.

Labor cannot celebrate yet. The PRO Act – like hundreds of other bills passed by the House – awaits action in the U.S. Senate. President Trumka has called this “the Labor Movement’s number one legislative priority.”

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils are proud to support the PRO Act. We urge its passage in the Senate and call on all union members and supporters to contact their Senators to back this important piece of Labor legislation.

SUPPORTING TROOPS AND VETERANS

Millions of military families, composed of veterans, active duty service members, spouses and dependents make their home in the United States. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) estimates that the military trains people in skills applicable for nearly 1,000 civilian occupations. Despite being well-prepared for civilian employment, veterans over the last decade – regardless of the branch of the Armed Forces in which they served – consistently have reported that finding a job was the top challenge they faced when they hung up their uniforms and transitioned into civilian life.

According to the DOL, in December 2019, the veteran unemployment rate dropped to 2.9%, down from 3.3% the previous month. The December 2019 numbers marked the 16th consecutive month that the veteran unemployment rate was lower than the non-veteran unemployment rate. Moreover, the veteran unemployment rate for the calendar year of 2019 was 3.1%, the lowest annual veteran unemployment rate since 2000.

Back in those days, veteran unemployment ranged in the double digits. In 2011, however, the Obama administration launched its Joining Forces Initiative which called on all sectors of society to hire veterans and their spouses, and opened avenues for veteran employment. The country's response was immediate and widespread.

The Department of Defense transformed its Transition Assistance Program into weeklong, mandatory training sessions for transitioning service members, giving them the skills and knowledge necessary to secure jobs, seek education and pursue optional training, such as how to start a business.

More federal agencies, corporations and nonprofit organizations followed suit, joined the hiring effort, and sought veterans for employment. For example, the American Maritime Partnership's "Military2Maritime" (M2M) program, backed by many of our affiliates, was one means through which the objective was to be achieved. This initiative sought to reduce regulatory credentialing burdens so service members could best use their military service and training to find family-wage employment in the civilian U.S.-flag maritime industry.

The M2M effort also organized maritime career and job-hire forums at port cities maximize their professional strengths by meeting with representatives from maritime companies, training schools, unions and others to learn about career opportunities in the maritime industry.

Over the past several years, MTD allies and affiliates helped organize and conduct M2M events around the country including New Orleans, Jacksonville, Norfolk, Houston and San Diego. Turnout at each of these events was high and many veterans converted their interactions with maritime industry representatives into jobs.

Section 305 of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2014 (titled "Opportunities for Sea Service Veterans") was another avenue which veterans used to convert their military experience into meaningful employment. The MTD-backed measure significantly reduced the regulatory impediments which sea service veterans formerly had to satisfy before seeking good-paying jobs on our waterways and at sea.

More recently, President Trump on March 4, 2019, signed Executive Order 13860. Titled "Supporting the Transition of Active Duty Service Members and Military Veterans into the Merchant Marine," this mandate brings awareness to the critical importance of the U.S. Merchant Marine to the national security, safety, and prosperity of our nation. Further, it aims to facilitate more easily the transition of active duty service members into the U.S. maritime industry.

The foregoing veteran opportunities have made huge strides toward our ultimate goal of a fully employed veterans' force. As a nation, however, we can and must continue to aid and assist those who put it all on the line for us.

The MTD has a rich tradition of supporting our men and women in uniform—both active duty and retired—and their families. We are a proud affiliate of the Union Veterans Council, and our affiliates have many veterans on their membership rolls.

That tradition remains very much alive and applicable today. The MTD calls upon our affiliates and Port Maritime Councils to continue with this campaign to ensure that every veteran in search of employment finds it in short order.

U.S. EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

Our industry won a hard-fought victory late last year that arguably has been under-reported even in maritime circles.

Included in a large appropriations bill that covers the federal government through September 2020 was a provision to reauthorize the U.S. Export-Import Bank for seven years. Significantly, that measure also permits the Ex-Im Bank's board to authorize loans in the event it lacks a quorum.

This is the largest such extension in the bank's history, and it wouldn't have happened without strong bipartisan backing spurred in part by grassroots action from the MTD, our affiliates, our Port Maritime Councils and other allies.

Cargo generated by Ex-Im Bank funds must be moved overseas on U.S.-crewed, U.S.-flagged vessels. It's a vital source of American jobs. And, as we've regularly noted at these meetings, the bank not only doesn't cost taxpayers a penny, it in fact reduces the national debt by transferring millions of dollars in receipts to the U.S. Treasury.

For those who are not familiar with the agency, it is self-described as: "Ex-Im is an independent federal agency that promotes and supports American jobs by providing competitive and necessary export credit to overseas purchasers of U.S. goods and services. A robust Ex-Im can level the global playing field for U.S. exporters when they compete against foreign companies that receive support from their governments. Ex-Im also contributes to U.S. economic growth by helping to create and sustain hundreds of thousands of jobs in exporting businesses and their supply chains across the United States. In FY 2019, over 89 percent of Ex-Im's transactions – more than 2,100 – directly supported American small businesses. Since 1992, Ex-Im has generated more than $9 billion for the U.S. Treasury for repayment of U.S. debt."

Now that the bank is fully open for business, we don't need to dwell on the illogical roadblocks it faced beginning in 2015. Suffice it to say that this is another example of why we never give up the fight, and why it's important to constantly educate politicians about our industry.

However, it is worth noting that there are nearly 100 other export credit agencies around the world trying to create jobs in their own respective countries. Moreover, the U.S. Export-Import Bank does not compete with the private sector. Instead, it fills export financing gaps through its insurance, guarantee, and direct lending programs when the private sector is unable or unwilling to do so.

The MTD, our affiliates and our Port Maritime Councils applaud all who support the Ex-Im Bank, and we look forward to the American jobs it helps maintain and will create.