

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

COVID-19 UPDATE

General: A reduction of new cases of coronavirus infections has been widely reported. That fact is often considered evidence of an easing of the pandemic and a reduction of risk. But compared to what? Relative to the holiday spikes in caseload, hospitalizations, and deaths, it is true that the numbers have backed off the upward climb and some areas have seen rollback of stay-at-home restrictions. But compared to the spring and summer peaks last year, when lockdowns prevailed, the situation is actually worse today. Especially by region, and considering arrival of hyper-contagious mutant strains, conditions are still dangerous.

Meeting cancellation: In that risky environment, the SUP February cycle of meetings were regrettably cancelled for reasons of health and safety. We look on to March now for a possible change, but in the data-based analysis there is much at stake for the Union. A trade Union that depends on the smooth operation of hiring halls has greater exposure than most and so it is an existential imperative to keep up our guard. This may sound familiar: wash hands, maintain social distancing, avoid congregation, limit indoor exposure times, and if you are sick get medical care and stay away from the halls. Many things can be done remotely, such as paying dues, applying for supplemental benefits, etc. Thanks to everyone for doing the basics to protect the hall, rotary shipping, our jobs, jurisdiction and way of life.

Vaccine: The uncertain and confusing rollout of the national vaccination program may be slowly improving as more supply comes to the states. In California, the over-prioritized hierarchy may soon be parallel with or replaced by a simpler age-based system. If vaccine access is improved by additional documentation (beyond a Merchant Mariner's Credential) confirming essential worker status, members are directed to see an SUP agent or contact SUP Headquarters to request a letter. Several mass vaccination sites are now operational or expected to begin operations soon. In San Francisco, Moscone Center is a Kaiser run facility and at the time of this report is inoculating 75 and older residents and will be a mass vaccination site as supply ramps up. Oakland will begin mass vaccination in late February depending on supply. Los Angeles has several sites in operation including Dodger Stadium. In Seattle, the Clark County Fairgrounds is a designated mass vaccination site. In Honolulu, the cruise terminal is designated as a site. As the process improves there will be many others, but **members with current health care eligibility are advised the fastest and most reliable method may be via their health care providers such as Kaiser or Health Net and are encouraged to register for the vaccine appointments there.**

Using all available methods and contacts, the SUP continues to argue for priority access to the vaccine for its members on the state, local, and national levels. Members who need an authorizing letter of essential worker status please contact the SUP Agents in the Branches or Headquarters. More information is available at the Union halls, the SUP Welfare Plan, and on our website at www.sailors.org.

APL

For an example of how difficult the already problematic dispatch situation can get, take

the *President Wilson*. Symptoms and a positive test for COVID-19 for two non-member joiners in Los Angeles launched a set of response protocols managed by the CDC and enforced by the Coast Guard. After unrelated congestion delays in LA, the initially positive testers disembarked and the ship sailed for Oakland, where it went to quarantine at anchor in San Francisco Bay for a period of 10 days. Then the crew was tested and re-tested and after another positive test the entire crew was disembarked but not before a new crew could be dispatched, tested, quarantined and tested again before joining at anchor. The ship finally came alongside in Oakland in the first week of February. As a result of this incident, APL initiated a new joining protocol that requires a COVID test after dispatch (plus regular clearances) followed by eight days of home or hotel quarantine followed by at least another test before joining. Overlaid on that is the Republic of Korea's new requirement of evidence of a negative test within 72 hours of joining any ship that will request entry. It is all in a day's work for SUP dispatchers, and in accordance with action taken by SUP Emergency Committees in the past, it means earlier dispatch for APL reliefs. We expect most will be ordered by the Company roughly 10 days in advance of arrival depending on conditions and subject to change.

PATRIOT

Watson-class update: On February 4, 2021 the Union was informed by Lance Bardo, President of Patriot Contract Services, that despite favorable rumors, despite the published award notice date of January 26, 2021, and despite MSC's repeated statement that it is "imminent," the Watson-class contract award is still unawarded and pending. Whatever the MSC intentions, Bardo noted that MSC is unlikely to make an award prior to March 31st when the current "bridge" contract ends. Bardo also informed the Union that vaccine distribution remains problematic within MSC and especially for MSC contract mariners, as it is everywhere else. The supply problems and logistics of cold storage and the second shot were noted as obstacles, although MSC had pledged to help contract mariners get the shot.

FOSS MARITIME COMPANY

As the membership will recall Foss notified the Union on December 28, 2020 that it was selling its bunkering business in California and wished to end its relationship of more than 24 years (far longer in predecessor agreements) on February 15, 2021. In the aftermath of that announcement, the Union held fast to the goal of maintaining the work in any form, as it was discussed with management. Increasingly during those preliminary discussions, after legal research, and following considerable industry outreach, meeting that goal has become increasingly unlikely. Accordingly, after exploring alternative outcomes, the Union entered into effects bargaining to achieve the best available terms of separation. Still the Union pressed for future work in various alternatives, but failing that also demanded that the Company provide severance to laid off employees, and to make good on promised benefits especially health care. Among a list of severance demands, a minimum payment of regular wages to February 28, 2021 as well as payment of all accrued vacation, although minor, was agreed to and form the basis for an overall settlement. The talks are ongoing and will keep the membership informed.

GOVERNMENT UPDATE

Executive Orders: President Biden issued several Executive Orders shortly after assuming office that affect the membership. The first is an historic “Buy America” order to not merely recognize the Jones Act, but to make it part of his signature transition platform, and enacted quickly in his administration. Executive Orders apply to the executive branch of the federal government. They are effective in that limited role, but they are not law. Sometimes they serve only as broad statements of position without any real enforcement or commitment. And it will be an action item for maritime labor to press for more than lip service. Still, it is an historic and exceptional endorsement of the commitment of a U.S. President to the Jones Act, and to the U.S. merchant mariners that depend on it.

The second Executive Order with immediate impact on the membership is “Promoting Covid-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel,” which requires that masks be worn on all “public maritime vessels, including ferries” to mitigate the risk of spreading Covid-19. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention followed up with its own order, “Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Transportation Hubs,” which requires all persons travelling on all commercial vessels to wear a mask.) This order will also put into effect new international travel requirements that include a negative COVID test within 72 hours of arrival in the United States. It will impact certain international flights taken by members returning from overseas. See the February issue of the *West Coast Sailors* for more.

Presidential appointments. Appointments favorable to labor, following the appointment of former Boston Mayor Marty Walsh to the Department of Labor, and California Secretary of Labor Julie Su as his deputy, continue to be central to the Biden administration. The appointment and Senate confirmation of Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg this month is a case in point. During his confirmation hearing, under direct questioning from the new Chair of the Senate Science Commerce and Transportation Committee, Maria Cantwell (D-WA): Buttigieg was unequivocal when he said, “I support the Jones Act.” In this context it is not mere political sloganeering. The statements made during confirmation are fundamentally important as we wrestle with the vast programs and regulation that will emanate from DOT and likely to affect the daily working lives of members. On February 17, along with the rest of the Board of the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO, we will again ensure Secretary Buttigieg understands maritime labor’s role. Finally, the SUP joined with others in the maritime industry to support the appointment of Acting Maritime Administrator Lucinda Lessley, who took over the role after the resignation of Adm. Mark Buzby in the wake of the Capitol riots. See the February edition of the *West Coast Sailors* for more.

GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

Meeting with Rep John Garamendi: Congressman Garamendi called a maritime working group meeting the day after the President’s “Buy America” Executive Order. Garamendi was enthusiastic about the shift in maritime policy to strongly favor U.S. flag shipping. His positive outlook for both legislation and regulation in pro-Union, pro-Jones Act environment was irresistible, but there will be much work ahead to produce lasting results.

Meeting with Rep Barbara Lee: Labor only. Discussion on the next COVID relief bill, PPE, Vaccine. Rep. Lee was irritated by the lack of direction of state officials to manage the

vaccine distribution, particularly as it impacts essential workers and the low-income communities of color. The federal government, Rep. Lee said, must take back the lead on vaccine distribution and direct the necessary funding directly to the areas that need it.

Virtual Tabletop VISA Exercise with TRANSCOM: Along with other seagoing unions and many shipping companies, I attended this advanced logistics operational simulation of a major military activation. It was immediately clear that the U.S. merchant marine retains a primary logistical role in any war-fighting situation. Especially evident was that the size and duration of the activation would put tremendous strain on the entire maritime military supply chain, including the labor that is all-too-often assumed to be standing by and awaiting orders.

Maritime Transportation System National Advisory Council Recommendations: The long-time employee of the SUP's Andrew Furuseth School of Seamanship, SUP Training Representative Berit Eriksson has applied for a Council seat. Having ably represented SUP interests in the past, she deserves our recommendation. Likewise, consistent with our growing role in government work, membership interests are well served by Ryan Libhart Pereyda, a West Coast mariner who now owns and operates a leading SUP-contracted employer in government work, Patriot Contract Services. The Council is a federal advisory committee within MARAD that advises the U.S. Department of Transportation on issues related to the marine transportation system.

House Transportation Hearing on Status of U.S. Merchant Marine: In coordination with the Legislative Committee of USA Maritime, the long-time U.S. merchant marine legislative advocate Jim Patti testified this week in the House of Representatives. Patti made the remarks in testimony on behalf of all the US maritime labor unions and shipping companies that belong to the USA Maritime coalition including the SUP. Chief among the points made was the need for priority access to the vaccine for merchant mariners. This follows the work last month of the Unions that independently wrote to the Governor's Association urging state priority access. Patti called attention to the heightened risks of close quarters aboard ship together with the international problem of access to shoreside medical care in coronavirus restrictions make mariners exposed on the front-line. (Despite yet another high profile call for expanded priority access, the outlook such a reasonable implementation by state coordination is frankly not good. In California, it appears possible that a simpler age-based access approach will soon overtake the CDC recommendations.) In addition to the vaccine position, Patti gave other various testimony on U.S. merchant marine. The full Committee showed keen interest on merchant mariner readiness and the nascent Tanker Security Program among other things. Accordingly, the focused delivery of a strong maritime labor message that was obviously well-received by members of Congress and so early in the session was a political victory. For more see the February issue of the *West Coast Sailors*.

HOLIDAYS

Lincoln's Birthday: All SUP Hiring halls will be closed on Friday February 12, 2021 in observance of Lincoln's Birthday, an ILWU Holiday and an SUP Contract Holiday under our Agreements with APL, Chevron, Matson, and the San Francisco Bar Pilots.

President's Day: All SUP halls will be closed on Monday, February 15 in accordance with the

agreements at APL Foss, Matson and Patriot Contract Services.

Washington's Birthday: This holiday on Monday, February 22 is observed under the SUP's Chevron Agreement and for all Marine Employees and Dispatchers employed by the San Francisco Bar Pilots.

ACTION TAKEN

No official meeting action taken. All formal membership action was comprehensively deferred until the next meeting.

Dave Connolly