



THE FEDERAL MARINER

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SIU Promotes Actions for CIVMAR Health and Safety in Joint Committee Meeting

The SIU in late January promoted CIVMAR safety during an important gathering in Norfolk, Virginia.

The occasion was the year's first joint labor-Military Sealift Command (MSC) safety committee meeting. In attendance were representatives from the SIU, MEBA and MSC, including three members of the agency's Force Safety division and Capt. John Carter, MSC Chief of Staff.

As safety concerns have grown, committee members agreed that there is a need for regular meetings of the safety committee each year.

A wide range of issues were discussed at the recent meeting, including the SIU's request to establish a subcommittee to handle emergency issues as they arise, in a timely and comprehensive manner. It is the SIU's goal to establish a procedure to address emergencies rapidly, with all the appropriate representatives working together to investigate and resolve the situation in a way which is most protective of the CIVMAR.

An informative and comprehensive presentation was provided by MSC safety representatives regarding the realignment of the agency's safety department. Additionally, a discussion regarding the afloat operational safety assessment (AOSA) process was covered. The SIU urges all CIVMARS to complete the anonymous

survey, if one is offered, as part of an AOSA or SMART inspection. Collection of safety data is critical to keeping everyone safe and informed.

The parties expect to meet quarterly to continue this work. The SIU has compiled a list of concerns from unlicensed mariners for the committee to address. We encourage you to send topics and concerns you would like to see addressed by the joint labor-management safety committee to siufedmariner@seafarers.org.

If you need general information, you can access Safety Department information through the MSC Portal at <https://msc.navy.deps.mil/Pages/MSCSafety.aspx>. If you cannot reach the portal, please let the union know by writing to siufedmariner@seafarers.org or contact your union representative. Union representative contact information is located on page 3 of this edition of *The Federal Mariner*.

If you have concerns about safety issues and need to make a report, you may contact the Force Safety team via e-mail at MSCHQ_Safety@navy.mil. You are also encouraged to contact the union with any safety concerns.

A very important part of keeping CIVMARS safe is to encourage a culture of safety. An element of developing and supporting a proactive and robust safety culture is reporting near misses and mishaps.



Pictured from left are Andrew Kallgren of MSC, Joe Michulski, MEBA Government Services Representative and Kermet Mangram, SIU Vice President Government Services Division.

MSC's safety newsletter is a quarterly publication and available to all CIVMARS. In a recent edition of MSC's SOS Safety Newsletter, the critical topic of how to report mishaps is included on Page 5. Reporting a mishap allows the MSC Safety Force to become aware of important information; it may also protect other CIVMAR employees from similar incidents.

See the information that follows. Submit a report to protect yourself and your shipmates.

Mishap Reports: What should I submit?

An MSO aboard an AKE sent an email inquiring whether an MSC mishap form should be sent in to the MSC Safety Office for an incident that recently occurred aboard the vessel. To generalize the MSO's email, a CIVMAR was sounding a DFM tank during fueling when DFM "burped" out of the sounding tube, then... What type of mishap report to submit to MSC Safety?

Here are a few scenarios that could have happened:

1. The sounding tube burped, sprayed some fuel on to the deck, no injury, no First Aid administered. This would be

classified as a HAZREP (Hazard Report), answering the question, why did the tank burp fuel through the sounding tube? Was there an unsafe condition, or an unsafe act? Get down to the basic root cause.

2. The sounding tube burped, fuel sprayed all over the CIVMAR, but luckily the CIVMAR was wearing PPE over their eyes and they were able to get to shower before skin irritation, so no injury. This is a Near Miss Report since the fuel could have gone into eyes, mouth, ears, or caused skin irritation or other complication. In the event of a Near Miss, was the CIVMAR wearing PPE, did the CIVMAR understand the potential hazards, etc.? Nearly missed being an injury.

3. If there was an injury, fuel in the eye or ingested in the mouth, if First Aid is administered then submit a First Aid report. But if an injury occurs beyond First Aid, then this is a Class D mishap (currently being added to the mishap form). Mishap reports should be full of information with the "5 Ws" answered in the narrative. All contributing causes checked off with full corrective actions being taken and any lessons learned. Let's work beyond "loss of situational awareness" and understand why incidents happen aboard our ships.



Next to partial picture of SIU Government Services Representative Sam Spain (far left) are Captain John Carter, MSC Chief of Staff, MSC Safety Force representatives, Willis Williams, MSC Command Administration, and Sandra Patterson Jackson, MSC Office of Counsel. Not pictured: Josie Weller, MSC LER.

Protect Your Money and Your Identity – Be Aware of This Tax Filing-Related Scam

The IRS has sent out a nationwide fraud alert. Taxpayers should be aware of a very dangerous NEW scam. The fraud continues to grow quickly. The IRS reported that there has been an increase in breaches of tax preparers' computer files.

Additionally, the IRS reported that once the criminals steal client data, they file fraudulent tax returns and then use the taxpayers' real bank accounts to deposit the returns. Once the returns are deposited into the victims' bank account, the criminals use various tactics to reclaim the refunds from the taxpayer victims. Different versions of the scam have been reported.

Claiming they are acting on behalf of the IRS, criminals pose as debt collection agency officials and demand that the erroneous deposit be sent to them. In another

version of the scam, the victim is left a telephone message and is threatened with being charged with criminal fraud or arrest. The phone recording provides a case number and a telephone number to call to return the refund.

The IRS is urging taxpayers to be on alert and only follow authentic procedures for returning what may be an erroneous refund. If this happens to you, you should contact your bank or credit union as soon as possible because it may be necessary to close your bank account. If you receive an erroneous refund and are working with a tax preparer, contact her or him immediately.

If you file your taxes electronically and your tax return is rejected because a previous fake return used your Social Security number, the IRS recommends that you

follow the process described in the publication "Taxpayer Guide to Identity Theft."

If you are impacted by this scam and receive a fake refund it is important to review the procedures noted in Tax Topic Number 161 – Returning an Erroneous Refund on the web at <https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc161>

Even if you are a victim of a falsely filed return, you are still responsible for mailing of paper tax return. The return should include Form 14039, an identity theft affidavit.

Keeping an eye out for these types of scams is especially important for employees who hold security clearances. In the Federal Mariner issue dated April-June 2015, an article stressing the importance of maintaining and protecting your security clearance is included along with tips and strategies to help federal mariners.

President's Column

Our Roots and Our Bright Future

As the SIU celebrates its 80 birthday, it's important to take time to reflect on how we got to where we are today. This not only includes the fights, struggles and victories – but also how we achieved our union's core values.

The labor movement for seafarers started by protecting mariners from exploitation at every turn. In the early 1900s, maritime employers, often sailing



Michael Sacco

with short crews, would pay "crimps" to deliver seamen for involuntary service aboard vessels. Brutal treatment of seafarers aboard ships, little or no safety protections, minimal wages, poor food, overwork, and attacks on vessels made a seafaring occupation a very harsh way to make a living.

The SIU and the other seafaring unions which came before us, worked to improve all these conditions to support mariners when they needed it most. These battles were hard-fought and long-lasting. Victories came inch by inch.

Today, while working conditions and safety aboard ship are much improved, mariners still find themselves in difficult or deadly situations. The sinking of the El Faro in October 2015, with the loss of 33 lives comes to mind. Enemy attacks like the one on the USS Ponce, unhealthy working settings like the shipyard drydock conditions aboard the Mt. Whitney – all point to the need for continued vigilance. It's still necessary to keep fighting to protect mariners across all segments of the U.S. maritime industry.

Health and safety provisions in your collective bargaining agreements, the fight for good wages, overtime, decent living conditions and habitability pay when living standards are not met, all represent the core values of the SIU – your union.

How do you support the union's goals – the efforts that impact you the most? Make sure you protect your wages (see the story on this page). Don't let anyone minimize your hard work at sea by interfering with money that you have worked hard to earn. Know your work and pay rules.

Make sure you understand how the legislative priorities of your elected politicians in the nation's capital impact you and your family (see story on page 4). In late March, the SIU will participate in the annual Maritime Congressional Sail-In. The all-day mission on Capitol Hill has become a staple for representatives from every segment of the American maritime industry, and I think its importance grows with each passing year.

I'm grateful that the maritime industry in general and the SIU in particular can count many friends on both sides of the aisle, but between the regular turnover in Congress and the ongoing attacks on our industry, we can never let up when it comes to promoting the U.S. Merchant Marine. We will never stop speaking up for Seafarers and Federal Mariners. America's national, economic and homeland security depend on the SIU and the mariners it represents. Speak up at your local level; it's important and it makes a difference. Politicians listen to their constituents.

Above all, keep up the great work aboard ship. When we carry the maritime message to Capitol Hill, we are really talking about your vital work and what it means to our country.

SIU Directory

Michael Sacco, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

David Heindel, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Kermett Mangram,
Vice President Government Services

Chester Wheeler,
Asst. Vice President Government Services

How to Keep and Protect Overtime, an Important Part of Your Pay

Many federal mariners spend months at sea, work in dangerous environments and sacrifice a lot to serve their country through their hard work. In addition to knowing their work makes a difference each day, mariners can make a comfortable living by working aboard a vessel. Generally, overtime pay makes up a good portion of a mariner's at-sea wage.

Union representatives are seeing an increase in mariner concerns about whether they are being credited with their accurate overtime wages. If you do not check your leave and earning statement on a regular basis, you may not know if your overtime pay is correct.

If you have a concern about shipboard supervisors denying overtime or entering overtime incorrectly into agency pay systems, it's important that you speak out right away. SIU representatives helping mariners who call for help find that employees are unsure of how their overtime is calculated and what they can do to make sure they keep what they earn.

Whether you work for NOAA, SUIBAN Bay – MARAD, MSC or ACOE the first step in protecting your overtime is to know your work rules and when your work entitles you to earn overtime as opposed to your regular wage. Generally, your entitlement to overtime is spelled out in your collective bargaining agreement. For MSC mariners, the overtime rules are located in Civilian Marine Personnel Instruction (CMPI 610).

Your agency will keep records of the overtime you worked, but not all records are accurate. Make sure you check your agency's work records at regular, short intervals to see if they match up with the hours you have worked.

In years past, mariners would keep their own overtime records in small books with the dates and overtime hours worked. Today, it is also easy to keep these records on your phone, tablet or computer. The key is to keep track of the dates, hours and what

work you performed. Mariners work hard, and you may not remember your work evolutions when it comes time to check the overtime earned over a specific pay period.

Recently the union was contacted when employees learned that shipboard supervisors were not paying overtime in accordance with the overtime rules. Once it is determined that there is a mistake in how your overtime pay is entered into the shipboard system, do not wait to speak out – say something as soon as possible so the mistake does not go on for multiple pay periods. Otherwise it is much harder to recoup all that money. If you are told there will be retaliation for bringing the problem to light, remember that you have earned your pay and you and your family deserve what you have earned through hard work.

You can file a grievance, or for MSC mariners, you are able to file a grievance or a premium pay dispute.

If you feel that your complaints may not be taken seriously or that your supervisor may present problems once you report discrepancies, call your union representatives to get the process underway.

Historically, the SIU has fought for good wages and overtime pay over the course of its 80-year history. Between 2010 and 2013 the SIU and MSC worked to negotiate overtime and penalty pay work rules, simplifying the Instruction which had been in effect for 25 years. CIVMARS benefited with a clear and concise instruction which should be applied consistently throughout the fleet.

Only you can take the first step to know if you are being paid accurately. If you work during overtime hours as assigned by your supervisor, you are entitled to this money. Overtime adds up to a big portion of your wage. Know your rights, keep track of your hours, make sure that money is paid accurately, and don't be afraid to speak out if you see a problem. If you need support, contact the SIU.

CIVMAR Note

MSC's Policy for Facial Hair and Use of Emergency Equipment

MSC has recently re-issued a safety policy regarding donning emergency/safety equipment CIVMARS may be required to wear in the event of shipboard emergency or an attack on their vessel. This includes equipment such as a self-contained breathing apparatus, emergency escape breathing device, gas masks, lifesaving and survival equipment, and other similar required devices and garments. There was a similar policy in place aboard MSC vessels.

Currently the policy requires that any hair growth between the skin and face-piece sealing surfaces, such as stubble beard growth, beard, mustache or sideburns which cross sealing surfaces

is impermissible and CIVMARS will be asked to trim their facial hair in a way which allows them to achieve an effective seal. CIVMARS should be sure they understand this policy and your rights and responsibilities if you have facial hair. The policy also addresses CIVMARS who have facial hair for religious observance reasons or medical conditions which make shaving difficult.

If you have questions or concerns about compliance with this policy, please contact your union representatives – East Coast: Sam Spain, East Coast Government Services Representative; West Coast: Chet Wheeler, Asst. Vice President, Government Services Unit.

NOAA Note

Collective Bargaining Negotiations to Begin in 2018

The SIU is ready to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Along with NOAA mariners, the union has been working for months to ensure the negotiations will bring improvements for all employees who work in the NOAA bargaining unit.

The parties were prepared to begin negotiations in January but the discussions were derailed by the government shutdown on January 20, 2018. New dates were rescheduled but agency representatives cancelled those meetings.

The union's bargaining team consists of five NOAA unit union members: Mark O'Conner, Leslie Allen, Todd Wilson, Joe Clark and David Fare. (The alternate members are Greg Walker, Jerrod Hozendorf and Johnny Brewer.) Also serving on the union team are SIU Government Services Division Vice President Kermett Mangram, East Coast Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain, and SIU Associate Counsel Jonathan Madden.

The SIU will keep mariners advised of the progress of these talks as news becomes available.

Did you miss a back issue of The Federal Mariner? PDF copies of every edition are available at www.seafarers.org

Look under the News menu, then click "CIVMAR News"

Seafarers-Crewed USNS Grumman Completes Overseas Deployment

Members of the SIU Government Services Division recently helped a Military Sealift Command (MSC) vessel wrap up a lengthy, successful mission.

The CIVMAR crewed replenishment oiler *USNS Leroy Grumman* returned to Naval Station Norfolk (Virginia) on Feb. 4, thus completing an overseas deployment in support of U.S. Navy and allied forces operating in the U.S. Sixth Fleet's area of responsibility.

"The *Leroy Grumman* left for our deployment to the Mediterranean Sea in September of 2017," said vessel master Capt. Kevin Tapp. "While we were deployed, the crew conducted over 30 underway replenishments at sea, providing 3.7 million gallons of fuel, 1,019 pallets of materials and provisions to U.S. Navy and NATO units from Canada, Italy, Turkey, Germany and the United Kingdom."

As noted by the U.S. Navy, the *Grumman* is crewed by civil service mariners "who perform all required tasks and provide all needed support aboard the ship."

Tapp added, "As the ship's master, one of my responsibilities includes sailing the vessel alongside customer ships during underway replenishment operations. Our rig captains supervise at-sea fueling and cargo transfer operations alongside customer ships. The able-bodied seamen man the underway replenishment stations during at-sea fueling operations while the engineers keep the ship's engines maintained and running at optimum performance. Our operations chief coordinates rendezvous and cargo requirements with customer ships at sea while the ship's master and navigators safely navigate the vessel between ports and underway replenishment evolutions."

Fleet replenishment oilers provide resupply services to U.S. Navy and allied ships while at sea so the combat-



The NATO Maritime Group Two flagship, *HMS Duncan* (left), takes on fuel during an underway replenishment Jan. 18 in the Mediterranean Sea with the CIVMAR crewed *USNS Leroy Grumman*. (NATO photo by GBRN LPhot Paul Hall)

ant vessels are able remain on station longer. The *Grumman* has five underway replenishment stations.

While on its most recent deployment, the *Grumman* visited Rota, Spain; Naples, Italy; Souda Bay, Island of Crete (Greece); Augusta Bay, Sicily; and Malaga, Spain.

"The crew's performance on this deployment was superior," added Tapp. "The *USNS Leroy Grumman's*

civil service mariners were outstanding ambassadors of goodwill for our country during all of our port visits, and all of our missions were conducted successfully and safely."

The ship's namesake, Leroy Grumman, was an American aeronautical engineer, test pilot, and industrialist who founded the company now known as Northrop Grumman.

Mariners May Submit Medical Certificate Forms Directly to USCG NMC

Editor's note: The U.S. Coast Guard's National Maritime Center issued the following notice in early February. It is linked on the SIU website in the News section, in a post that's dated Feb. 14. The NMC website is www.uscg.mil/nmc

To continuously improve our services to mariners, the Coast Guard has established a new option for submission of medical certificate applications (CG-719K and CG-719KE forms). Beginning February 1, 2018, mariners may submit **medical certificate only** applications directly to the National Maritime Center (NMC). Regional Examination Centers (RECs) will continue to accept medical certificate application submissions as well.

The requirements for submission have not changed with the exception that, beginning on February 1, 2018, submissions to the NMC can be made via e-mail at D05-SMB-MEDAIP-TEAM@uscg.mil. Electronic submission requirements can be found on the NMC website.

At this time, direct submission to the NMC is only for the medical certificate application. **Applications for a Merchant Mariner Credential (CG-719B/MMC) cannot be submitted directly to the NMC.** Any e-mailed application for an MMC, with or without a medical certificate application, made directly to the NMC will be deleted and the applicant will get an e-mail response with directions on how to resubmit their application(s) to an REC.

If you have any questions, please contact the NMC Customer Service Center by e-mailing IASKNMC@USCG.mil, by calling 1-888-IASKNMC (427-5662), via our online chat system, or by visiting our website.

How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy. 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:

www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp

Forms are also available under "union forms" in the SIU membership tab.

Contact Information

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USNS Miguel Keith Signals Additional SIU Government Services Division Jobs

New tonnage means more jobs – in this case for SIU Government Services Division members – as construction recently began on the latest addition to the Military Sealift Command (MSC) fleet.

Work started on the future *USNS Miguel Keith*, an expeditionary sea base (ESB) vessel, on Jan. 30 at the General Dynamics NASSCO shipyard in San Diego. The ceremony served as a formal recognition of the start of the ship's construction, with the vessel expected to be delivered in 2019.

NASSCO is a union shipyard.

Capt. Scot Searles, program manager of MSC's Strategic Sealift and Theater Sealift, weighed in on the ceremony for the *Keith*, saying, "A keel laying is the first major milestone in the construction of a new ship. The keel is the symbolic backbone of the ship. Over the next several months, ESB-5 will begin to take shape and I look forward to seeing its progress as we continue constructing this versatile ship."

The ship is named for a Vietnam-era Marine machine gunner who, while severely wounded and outnumbered by the enemy, charged the approaching attackers in order to save the lives of his fellow Marines. Keith posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his heroism. His mother, Delores Keith, serves as the sponsor of the vessel that bears her son's name, and though she was too infirm to attend the keel-laying, a family friend welded Delores' initials onto the keel block in her stead.

The 784-foot-long *Miguel Keith* will serve as a floating base, with a 52,000-square-foot flight deck, fuel and equipment storage, repair spaces, magazines, and mission-planning spaces. The vessel will carry up to 250 personnel, along with support helicopters and other aircraft for mine countermeasures, counter-piracy operations, maritime security operations, humanitarian aid and disaster-relief missions.

The *Miguel Keith* will be the third ESB produced by NASSCO in the Montford Point class, and the fifth overall in its class. The Montford Point class is comprised of two variants, all crewed by

SIU members and working to support the U.S. Maritime Prepositioning Force. The *USNS Montford Point* and *USNS John Glenn*, which have been dubbed Expeditionary Transfer Docks (ESD), have been delivered and are currently in service. The first of the ESB variant, *USS Lewis B. Puller*, was delivered to the Navy in 2015, while the *USNS Hershel "Woody" Williams* was christened in October 2017 and is expected to be delivered to MSC at the end of February.

The primary difference between an ESB and an ESD vessel is that an ESB is outfitted with a flight deck and hangar that can support helicopters and tilt-rotor aircraft, while an ESD is not so equipped. This additional flight deck affects the stability of the vessel, which helps dictate the types of missions each ship can undertake.

According to the Navy, "The Expeditionary Transfer Dock (ESD) / Expeditionary Sea Base (ESB), formerly known as the Mobile Landing Platform (MLP) / Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB), is a highly flexible ship that provides logistics movement from sea to shore supporting a broad range of military operations. ESD/ESB class ships leverage an existing commercial design of the Alaska class crude oil carrier built by General Dynamics National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (NASSCO), to ensure design stability and low developmental costs. These ships operate within Maritime Prepositioning Ship squadrons as mobile sea bases or as the component commander requires providing the U.S. Navy fleet with a critical access infrastructure that supports the flexible deployment of forces and supplies."



A rendering of the future *USNS Miguel Keith*, courtesy NASSCO

News and Views from the Nation's Capital

President Trump Proposes 2019 Pay Freeze and Additional Cuts to Benefits for Federal Employees; Federal Employee Unions Ready to Fight These Plans

The Trump Administration released its budget in mid-February and proposed a list of cuts that would negatively impact the federal workforce across all agencies. Here's how the proposals may impact you if they make it through a congressional review and are implemented in 2019.

- **Pay** - A pay freeze for the federal workforce;
- **Pension** - A cut to employee pensions by basing retirement annuity calculations on an employees' average of their high five-year salary rather than the last high three-year average. This generally lessens the amount of annuity an employee will receive because during the last three years of an employee's career, most employees earn the most money, driving their average up.
- **Pension** - A requirement that Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) participants pay about seven percent contributions of their salary. Currently the contribution rate is one percent. The proposal would increase mandatory contributions until seven percent is reached.
- **Pension** - Eliminates the annual Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) for current and future federal retirees under the FERS program and reduces the COLA for CSRS employees by five percent each year.
- **Health Care** - In an effort to shift costs to employees, the budget proposes to revise the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program and use a voucher system to have the government cover a smaller percentage of premiums.
- **Health Care** - In an effort to limit health care choices, a proposal would eliminate the requirement that the Federal Employment Health Benefits Program include nationwide indemnity programs. These programs allow an employee to have the widest choices in visiting doctors or using hospitals. This program is important to employees or their family members who may have an illness which requires special treatment. This proposal would require people to move into more restrictive PPO or HMO systems.
- **Leave** - The budget cuts the number of days of paid leave for all federal employees and puts all types of leave into one category. This strategy eliminates the opportu-

nity to convert unused sick leave to time in service for retirement purposes.

These proposals, if implemented, will hurt all who serve in positions throughout the federal government.

Chet Wheeler, the SIU's assistant vice president of Government Services, said, "The SIU will advocate in every way possible to ensure that these proposals will be eliminated from the 2019 budget. Federal mariners in ACOE, NOAA, SUISAN Bay – MARAD and MSC make sacrifices every day. They deserve to have their pay and benefits remain at the highest levels possible. The SIU will continue to work with other unions in nationwide worker coalitions to make sure these cuts don't become a reality."

The SIU belongs to the Federal Workers Alliance (FWA) and the United Defense Workers Coalition (UDWC), two organizations which represent hundreds of thousands of federal-sector workers. Solidarity with other unions allows the SIU to oppose these proposed changes more effectively.

Other labor unions are also watching the budget issue closely. Representing 150,000 employees working across the country, National Treasury Employees Union President Tony Reardon issued a statement which noted: "It appears that the administration is throwing every harmful proposal it could gather at the civil service system and federal employees. Taken together, these proposals represent a full-scale assault on what has been a bedrock of our democracy: a civil service made up of skilled professionals who are committed to the taxpayers they serve, not the politicians."

Other organizations representing the interests of federal workers and federal retirees also weighed in on President Trump's budget.

The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) is an advocacy group which works to protect the interests of active and retired federal employees. NARFE President Richard Thissen issued the following statement: "This budget singles out federal workers by implementing a pay freeze, which is perplexing given the president's continual praise of the

strong economy and rising wage growth.... Denying a modest pay raise during a time of economic prosperity demonstrates disdain for federal workers and needlessly punishes middle-class households."

The Government Executive website, on March 1, 2018, reported that during a hearing conducted by the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's federal management panel, Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-North Dakota), the top participating Democrat, said at the hearing it was important to "make a note about the administration's proposed FY19 [budget] and the grave impact it would have on federal employees if it were implemented and consequently the grave impact it would have on the recruitment of federal employees."

The "proposed threats to federal employees in the budget are numerous," Heitkamp said, citing suggested changes to pay, retirement, health care, student loan forgiveness benefits, collective bargaining and due process rights. "There are proposals that treat federal employees in a way that I think [is] less than fair."

The ranking Republican on the Committee, Sen. James Lankford (R-Oklahoma) commented on the pay freeze, saying, "I don't think that gains us anything. I think it hurts us in recruitment."

The SIU encourages mariners to study these issues closely and support congressional representatives and organizations who will advocate for you. Participation in your union protects you and your family by keeping up with ever-changing legislative efforts. The SIU keeps careful watch to make sure the interests of federal mariners are promoted by legislators in both branches of Congress.

Additionally, each year the SIU participates in the Maritime Congressional Sail-In. It's a day-long event during which representatives from every component of the American maritime industry meet with senators, congressional representatives and their staffs to promote the U.S. Merchant Marine, American-flag shipping and domestic shipbuilding.

Noting the event's significance, SIU President Michael Sacco said, "You all know we work in a heavily regulated industry, and that's why we never stop speaking up for mariners and for the laws and programs that keep Old Glory flying on the rivers, coasts and high seas."

This year's Sail-In is scheduled to take place March 27.

For information on how to join the SIU, turn to page 3 of this issue of *The Federal Mariner*.