

Where have all America's mariners gone?

“We must not accept the continued overall decline in U.S.-flag tonnage. A decline in U.S.-flag tonnage means a decline in U.S. jobs—something I will not accept.”

Those strong words were spoken by U.S. Maritime Administrator Captain William Schubert at the Feb. 22 board meeting of the Maritime Trades Dept., AFL-CIO in New Orleans. The decline in the U.S.-flag merchant fleet has resulted in a shortage of mariners that could “potentially cripple a large-scale, sustained overseas conflict, like the Persian Gulf War.” He pledged to give the issue his “highest priority.”

Since his appointment last year, Schubert has had to hit the ground running, dealing with a number of formidable challenges—maritime security, an embattled Title XI ship financing program and the continued shrinkage of the U.S. flag merchant fleet and its labor pool.

The loss of U.S. mariner jobs parallels the shrinkage of the U.S.-flag merchant fleet. Once the largest in the world, the U.S.-flag merchant fleet now ranks 12th, according to the Maritime Administration. While U.S. owners now control the world's 4th largest fleet of merchant ships, most are with open registries such as Panama, Liberia and the Bahamas.

One short-term solution to the mariner shortage, Schubert told Maritime Trades Department meeting attendees, was to create a merchant mariner reserve for unlicensed mariners, a possibility he discussed with “top brass” at the Pentagon. He admitted, however, that long-term solutions were “desperately needed” and that ways should be found to “level the playing field” for U.S.-flag operators.

By John Snyder,
Senior editor

BILL ON THE HILL

One legislative effort to “level the playing field” for U.S.-flag merchant ship operators is a bipartisan-backed bill introduced last year. Called the Merchant Mariner Cost Parity Act of 2001, the bill aims to provide tax relief for U.S.-flag merchant ship operators and U.S. merchant mariners in commercial foreign trade by modeling the tax regimes administered in several other countries.

The legislation was introduced by Rep. James L. Oberstar (D-Minn.) and co-sponsored by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) and would replace the corporate income tax on foreign-earned U.S.-flag ship revenue with a flat tonnage tax comparable to those applied in other countries. The measure would also exempt up to \$80,000 of a U.S. merchant mariner's overseas income from federal taxes, allow U.S.-flag ships to comply with International Maritime Organization design and construction standards, and permit insurance settlements in cases of job-related shipboard injury or death.

The bill has won support from unions, including the American Maritime Officers (AMO), International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P) and Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA).

INDUSTRY-GOVERNMENT EFFORT

“Recruitment and retention of mariners is a growing concern in the United States, regarding both international and domestic commerce as it is in much of the maritime world,” said RADM Robert C. North, U.S. Coast Guard (Ret.) now president of his own consultancy, North Star Maritime, Inc., told last month's annual meeting of the Connecticut Maritime Association



A recruitment brochure produced by the Ship Operation Cooperative Program (SOCP), a joint government-industry effort, aims to educate and attract candidates to a maritime career

(CMA), Stamford, Conn.

North referred to a joint industry and government conference called Maritime Careers—Creating an Action Plan for Recruiting and Retaining American Mariners, held at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, May 23-24, 2001. At that time, North was the Coast Guard's Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety and Environmental Protection. The conference identified six principal issues impacting recruitment and retention:

1) Public education and awareness:

RECRUITMENT & TRAINING

The general public is not aware of the vital role that the MTS plays in the economy of the U.S. and mariners are often held in low esteem. The only time marine transportation receives widespread media attention is when there is an oil spill or catastrophic event.

- 2) **Regulatory burden of STCW 95:** The 1995 amendments to the international convention on training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers impose heavier training burdens on the mariner, maritime education and training institutions and the industry as a whole. The system makes it more difficult for unlicensed mariners to become a licensed officer on their own. Also the time and cost involved in maintaining unlicensed and licensed qualifications is a significant deterrent to recruiting and retention of mariners.
- 3) **Criminal liability,** particularly involving "strict liability" statutes is causing some seafarers to seek other employment opportunities.
- 4) **Maritime policy, tax relief and**

other incentives: Wages for blue water mariners have not kept pace with opportunities ashore. Many international governments help offset the wage discrepancy by providing tax relief to mariners who are employed out of their country. The U.S., as a matter of policy, must look to ways to "level the playing field" for U.S. international operators so they can more effectively compete, through tax reform, regulatory reform, and other support programs.

- 5) **Lifestyle and quality of life issues:** Mariners spend significant time away from home and family. Living aboard ship, involves close accommodations, lack of socialization opportunities onboard and little or no shore leave. Because technology and automation have reduced crew size, there are now more administrative and maintenance functions for fewer crew.
- 6) **Recruitment/Career path:** There is no central point where potential mariners can determine how to enter the industry or obtain career path

EDISON CHOUSET TAKES TRAINING IN-HOUSE

"Our training center is a great retention tool," says Chad Hebert, manager of safety and training at Edison Chouest Offshore's Training Center, Galliano, La. "The training is free to all our mariners and it gives them an opportunity to upgrade their licenses," says Hebert.

ECO's Don McIntyre, vice president, Health, Safety and Environment, says some 2,000 mariners have passed through the doors of the ECO Training Center since its first classes were conducted in 1999. The \$2.5 million facility has five classrooms and an environmental pool and is staffed by five full-time instructors.

This past November, the center's 500/1,600 gross registered ton mate near coastal training and assessment program received U.S. Coast Guard approval. The course satisfies the STCW 95 requirement for "Officer in Charge of a Navigational Watch" and, upon successful completion, will satisfy requirements for Master Near Coastal of more than 200 tons.

RECRUITMENT & TRAINING

information.

Six working groups were set up at a follow-up meeting in Aug. 2001 at the Maritime Institute of Technology & Graduate Studies (MITAGS) in Linthicum, Md., to tackle each of these issues.

Public education and awareness: Co-chaired by Charles Kurz II of Keystone Shipping and Bill Gibbs of Osprey Ship Management; **Regulatory Burden/STCW 95:** Co-chaired by Joe Cox, president of the Chamber of Shipping of America and Glen Paine of MITAGS; **Criminal liability:** Co-chaired by Steve Candito of the National Response Corp. and Ted Tregurtha of Moran Corp. **Maritime policy, tax relief and other incentives:** Co-chaired by John Gaughan of First American Bulk Carriers and Taylor Jones of MarAd; **Lifestyle/quality of life:** Co-chaired by Steve Brundrette of Canal Barge and Ken Parris of Offshore Marine Services Association (OMSA); and **Recruitment and career path:** Co-chaired by Tony Naccarato of Marine Transport Corp. and Ed Kelly of American Maritime Officers.

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Organization	Reader Service #	Web site
American Maritime Officers	54	www.amo-union.org
Bluewater & Associates	7	www.blue-h20.com
California Maritime Academy	48	www.csom.edu
Chesapeake Marine Training Institute	11	www.chesapeakemarineinst.com
Fremont Maritime Services	19	www.sea-safety.com
MarineSafety International	27	www.marinesafety.com
Maritime Professional Training	52	www.mptusa.com
MITAGS	49	www.mitags.org
Star Center	35	www.star-center.com
Texas Engineering Extension Service	36	teexweb.tamu.edu

The working groups are expected to release details about their action plans at Maritime Careers: Implementing the Action Plans for Recruiting and Retaining Mariners conference, May 1-2, 2002 at the Baltimore Campus, MITAGS.

Joint industry-government efforts, such as the Ship Operations Cooperative Program (SOCP) have held a series

of meetings address the topic of mariner recruitment and retention, created a web site, www.socp.org, produced recruitment brochures and shipboard training videos, and held job fairs. It's also working on the issue of mariner smart cards, which ultimately could help in the creation of a database of licensed and unlicensed mariners. **ML**