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Danson has Obama's ear

THE Barack Obama administration in the US is only a month old and already the new president is trying to undo legislation by his predecessor covering drilling rights off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Former leader George W Bush consulted with his friends in the oil industry to discuss energy policy, but Obama has gone to Los Angeles for his inspiration.

Step forward former Boston barman and actor Ted Danson, who was the first to fill the witness chair in front of Democrat politicians keen to rip up Bush's rules. It has been a quick leap from Houston to Hollywood for Obama and one that has the oil industry in uproar in the US.

Danson, who starred in Boston-based comedy 'Cheers', is a longtime environmental activist who is dead against offshore drilling, especially if it was to ruin the view from a California cliff top.

Next to Danson was another environmentalist — Phillipe Cousteau, chief ocean correspondent for the Animal Planet television network and grandson of renowned ocean researcher Jacques Cousteau. Politicians claimed the two men were there not because of their fame, but due to their knowledge about the marine environment.

Anger at Calais job cuts

THERE is anger at France's principal passenger seaport of Calais over the decision by SeaFrance to shed a third of its workforce, because the majority of the seafarers and shore staff facing the axe live in and around the town.

Management of SeaFrance, under pressure from French national rail operator SNCF, of which it is a subsidiary, say the loss of 650 jobs is necessary to make ends meet on the Calais-Dover ferry operation.

But the mayor of Calais, Natacha Bouchart, told French television she blamed management for the downturn in cross-Channel traffic, while a spokesman for one of the seafarers' unions was even more critical. He claimed there was a belief among the workforce that the employee cuts were the first step to a sell-off of the company. Something denied by SeaFrance.

The union official added he and his colleagues were waiting to study the financial details to be issued before deciding what action should be taken to protect SeaFrance's 1,700 jobs.

**Sohar and Montreal go green**

ROTTERDAM's Green Award Foundation, celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, has welcomed the ports of Sohar and Montreal to its quality and safety in shipping certification scheme. Sohar provides rebates of 5% on its port dues to Green Award-certified tankers, and Montreal grants a 10% fee reduction on port dues to all vessels with the certification.

Some 223 tankers and bulk carriers and 40 shipping companies have been certified since the scheme started in 1994 in which seagoing vessels of 20,000 dwt and above are evaluated for technical condition, crew quality and onshore management.

Olsen reveals forbidden fruit

NORWEGIAN businessman Fred Olsen is not one to wear his financial heart on his sleeve. So we were more than a little interested to see in a passing cruise industry news service that Fred.Olsen Cruise Lines suffered a loss of NKr181m (\$26m) last year against NKr152m in 2007.

UK director Nigel Lingard agreed that some years ago such information would have been forbidden fruit. But in more recent times the figures have been given as a contribution to the results of the multifaceted holding company, he said.

Apart from recession, Olsen had to bear the costs of introducing two new ships — Balmoral and the stretched Braemar.

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