

GUEST ARTICLE

from the desk of
U.S. Rep. Bob Gibbs
Chairman
House Subcommittee on
Water Resources and Environment



Harbor maintenance funds must be put to intended use

For too long, America has watched as the size of the federal government ballooned, deficit spending reached dangerous levels, and our debt surpassed a record \$15 trillion. As I work to rein in wasteful government spending and turn our economy around, I also understand that we cannot neglect the types of investments that Congress should be making. Unlike a lot of government spending, investing in transportation provides a positive economic return on the investment.

While 99 percent of U.S. overseas imports and exports go through the nation's ports, waterborne commerce is by far our most ignored mode of transportation. Nearly a third of the nation's gross domestic product is derived from international trade, the bulk of which is waterborne. With more of our economy expected to be dependent on international trade in the coming decades, we must begin to prepare our infrastructure for the future.

Instead of looking at the system port-by-port or river-by-river, as chairman of the House Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee, I believe it is important that we recognize that the system as a whole must be functioning properly. For example, when a harbor has not been dredged to its proper depth, it will reduce traffic at that port as well as destinations upriver. Likewise, a lock failure upriver will no doubt hurt the ports looking to ship those goods overseas.

Proper investment in dredging our ports is critical to the functionality of our system. Our ports and waterways must be at their authorized depths and widths so products are able to move to their overseas destinations in an efficient and economical manner. When channels are not properly dredged, ships cannot take on full loads, resulting in a loss of efficiency and increase in cost. But every inch of depth means additional goods that can be

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shipped, and with our nation attempting to increase our exports, we need to ensure that our nation's ports are operating at their full potential and our ships aren't running half-full.

However, despite the fact that the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund received about \$1.4 billion in collections in fiscal 2011, Congress only appropriated \$815 million for maintenance dredging at our ports, and only two of our nation's 10 largest ports are at their authorized depths and widths.

That is why I co-sponsored legislation introduced by Rep. Charles W. Boustany Jr., R-La., called the Realize America's Maritime Promise, or RAMP, Act. This bill will help ensure that every dollar collected into the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund is appropriated for the intended use: to dredge our ports. I will continue to work toward its passage because we cannot sit back and neglect our nation's waterborne infrastructure system needs.

Many Americans overlook the importance of waterborne transportation because they do not regularly interact with it or understand the benefits that it brings, but the economic importance of maritime trade cannot be underestimated. Addressing the infrastructure needs of the nation's ports is not about economic benefits to a few shipping companies. It is about keeping American farms and businesses competitive and growing American jobs. 🇺🇸

Rep. Gibbs, a Republican, took office in the House in January 2011, representing Ohio's 18th District. In addition to chairing the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee, he serves on two other subcommittees of the T&I Committee, as well as on the House Committee on Agriculture and two of its subcommittees. He previously served in the Ohio Senate and Ohio House of Representatives.



U.S. Rep. Bob Gibbs (left), R-Ohio, listens to a presentation by Mike Christensen, deputy executive director for development at the Port of Los Angeles, during a tour of the port.