January 31, 2017

The Honorable Donald Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write to bring your attention to an issue that is vital to our nation’s transportation infrastructure – properly maintaining America’s harbors and navigation channels. The U.S. needs fully maintained navigation channels for safe and efficient freight transportation to the global marketplace.

In your budget request for Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18), we urge you to include funding and estimates for harbor maintenance programs that are consistent with the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA 2014) and the Water Resources Development Act of 2016 (WRDA 2016). These bipartisan laws, which passed with overwhelming majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate, provide three specific directions on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) harbor maintenance activities.

First, to end a long trend of USACE and Office of Management and Budget underfunding of harbor maintenance, Congress set increasing targets for appropriations from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) that reach 100 percent of annual revenues into the HMTF by FY25. WRRDA 2014’s FY18 HMTF spending target is 74 percent of the projected amount of receipts into the HMTF during FY17.

Second, these Acts authorize $50 million in additional funding for eligible donor ports and energy transfer ports to better reflect the economic contributions made by individual ports to the HMTF.

Finally, these Acts direct the USACE to include in its annual budget request two estimates: (1) an estimate of the nationwide average availability of the authorized depths and widths of all federally-maintained navigation channels that would result from each annual harbor maintenance budget request; and (2) an estimate of the average annual amount of appropriations from the HMTF that would be required to increase that availability to 95% over a three-year period.
The HMTF was authorized by the Harbor Maintenance Revenue Act of 1986. Revenue for the HMTF is derived from a 0.125 percent ad valorem tax imposed upon maritime cargo imports and domestic movement through specified U.S. ports, Saint Lawrence Seaway tolls, and investment earnings. General taxpayers do not contribute revenue to the fund.

While many transportation infrastructure programs are struggling to identify beneficiary-paid revenue streams to meet their needs, maritime commerce has been paying enough to meet the operations and maintenance needs of all federally-maintained harbors for decades, but the federal government has been withholding one-third to one-half of these payments. We urge you to dedicate harbor maintenance tax revenue for its intended purpose by including in your annual budget requests funding amounts for harbor maintenance that meet the WRRDA 2014 annual targets, as well as the two estimates described above.

U.S. ports serve as a critical link to connect U.S. manufacturers, farmers, and businesses with markets around the world and are indispensable to making the exports of U.S. goods cost-competitive. The inefficiencies resulting from inadequately maintained harbors hurt U.S. economic growth. If your Administration requests harbor maintenance appropriations consistent with the WRRDA 2014 targets, we are confident that Congress will work with you to provide those amounts. No new taxes or revenues are needed to do this.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress

Ted Poe
Member of Congress

Gene Green
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress
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Member of Congress

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