

Testimony of A. Paul Anderson
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House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
America Builds: Maritime Infrastructure
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for your invitation to testify this morning on such an important topic to both the nation's economic growth and security: America's Maritime Infrastructure. And congratulations on your appointment to lead this important subcommittee. As the President and CEO of Port Tampa Bay, the Chairman of the Coalition for America's Gateways and Trade Corridors, the Immediate past Chair of the American Association of Port Authorities, and a former Federal Maritime Commissioner, the work and growth of America's seaports is deeply personal to me and I am honored to be here today.

At the outset, let me thank two Florida members of this subcommittee – Congressmen Dan Webster and Brian Mast -- for their tremendous ongoing support for Port Tampa Bay and all 16 Florida seaports. They recognize the critical role that ports and port operations play in ensuring the efficient movements of cargo to Florida's supply chain to serve our rapidly growing population.

We are proud of the role that Port Tampa Bay plays as Florida's largest and most cargo-diverse seaport and as West Central Florida's largest economic driver. According to our most recent economic impact study, we have a \$34.6 billion impact on our region and support more than 192,000 total jobs. This includes \$4.6 billion of direct business revenue, the re-spending and local consumption impact of \$2.8 billion, and the related user output of \$27.2 billion. This dollar value represents the sphere of influence of the marine terminals, shipyards, and non-maritime real estate holdings of the Port.

Shipbuilding and Repair is also an essential operation at Port Tampa Bay and is woven well into our history. During World War II, the Port was called upon to assist with shipbuilding efforts for our nation's military and as the war was ending the Florida legislature established our charter and created the Tampa Port Authority. Today, we are home to four ship building and repair facilities at the Port that generate approximately 2,983 full-time jobs with an economic impact of \$232.7 million.

Our Port continues to make strategic investments for our future, including improving the resiliency of our port facilities, growing and expanding our containerized cargo business, and, with this Committee's support in WRDA 2024, the undertaking of a major new project to deepen our shipping channels to accommodate the growing fleet of large ships that want to call upon Port Tampa Bay. The jobs and money that flow back into our regional economy is a direct result of our strategic planning and growth.

Through the foresight and support of our Champions in Congress, especially Members of this Committee, America's ports such as ours have acquired and updated key equipment, modernized berths and operations, and undertaken large projects that expand our ability to move the cargo our nation's and our state's businesses, industry, and residents depend upon.

For instance, grant programs such as the Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP), have enjoyed bipartisan support since it was founded in 2019. PIDP is a critical tool for ports to upgrade their

infrastructure to keep pace with advancements at ports around the world. These grant projects are truly partnerships between the Federal Government, state, and local governments, alongside private partners.

I would also be remiss if I didn't mention how important the biennial WRDA process is to our nation's ports for economic and infrastructure progress and vital for the sustenance and growth of trade and commerce across our country. It was a great privilege for me to testify before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in December 2023 to help the Committee kick off the development of WRDA 2024. I want to commend the members of the Committee for their hard work in crafting and passing this hallmark legislation to keep WRDA on its biennial schedule, which is so important in the timing of our projects to minimize delays and reduce costs.

This investment and focus on the needs of America's ports is critical for our economic and national security. Ports abroad, in both allied and adversarial countries are investing heavily in their port infrastructure and rightly recognize ports as critical infrastructure. America must respond in kind by investing in our ports to handle more exports and imports. A recent study from the U.S. Committee on the Maritime Transportation System found that increases in infrastructure spending could spur economy-wide returns of \$2-\$3 for every dollar spent.

Our nation's ports are integral to the national infrastructure and the responsibility of protecting, growing, and innovating the supply chains that link every part of our economy falls to all of us from the local, regional, state, and federal levels. This includes building strong relationships with our private partners to assist in achieving these goals.

I was heartened to hear the new Secretary of Transportation, in his confirmation hearing, commit to doing all he can to find ways in which to accelerate the processing of federal grants, reform bureaucratic processes at all levels, and deliver funds more efficiently so that ports like ours can deliver important projects on time and at or under budget. Burdensome delays and inflexible requirements written into grant requirements and agreements redirect resources away from the intended scope of the project, and result in wasteful spending and inefficiencies that keep us from our core functions to plan for the long-range development of ports and port facilities.

Before I close, let me thank you for your support of the men and women of the United States Coast Guard, who are unheralded partners in our work to secure America's ports and waterways. We have a seamless working relationship with our Coast Guard partners in the greater Tampa Bay area.

We are working with the Coast Guard right now on a most timely project to replace and repair countless navigational aides in our shipping channels that were heavily impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which devastated our region and our state during a 12-day period last September and October. Because of the loss of this vital equipment, night-time navigation is reduced or unavailable, causing delays in the movement of ship traffic on our 45-mile channel. As you well know, the movement of ships into and out of ports is tightly choreographed and any disruption in schedules impacts the overall supply chain. Our Port, along with our tenants, service providers and various industries delivers a broad assortment of goods and services to the Central Florida region, including 35 million tons of cargo, 17.3 million tons of petroleum, and cruise capacity for over 1.6 million passengers.

As to my earlier comments about reducing inefficiencies, anything your subcommittee can do to support the Coast Guard in reducing procurement regulations and the deployment of this important equipment would help ports like ours speed the recovery from natural disasters and get us back to full capacity just as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your pivotal role in shaping the future of our nation's maritime industry and infrastructure. Your work in supporting America's supply chain supports the development of robust international trade routes and fosters the more efficient movement of goods and services throughout our nation.