

Testimony of Paul Anderson

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House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2024: Stakeholder Priorities

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for your invitation to testify this afternoon about the importance of the Committee's commitment to enact into law every two years a comprehensive and bipartisan Water Resources Development Act, or WRDA as it is commonly known.

I am speaking today not only as the President and CEO of Port Tampa Bay, but also as the Chairman of both the American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA) and the Coalition for America's Gateways and Trade Corridors (CAGTC). It is my goal to talk discuss how the WRDA process not only impacts Port Tampa Bay, but all of America's ports and trade gateways.

I would like to thank the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for working to ensure that our nation's maritime transportation system remains functional. As maritime trade continues to rebalance from the recent COVID-19 pandemic-driven supply chain disruptions, your recognition of the important role played by our nation's ports and Army Corps of Engineers' maritime navigation infrastructure has been critical. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and discuss how we can continue to maintain this nationally critical infrastructure for generations to come.

WRDA is a lifeline for our nation's economic and infrastructure progress. The biennial rhythm of WRDA is vital for the sustenance and growth of trade and commerce across our great nation. WRDA's consistent schedule allows Port Tampa Bay, and others like us, to plan, develop, and execute projects critical to our nation's economic security and growth. This is a key piece of legislation that provides essential authority for water infrastructure projects across the country. It helps to ensure that our nation's ports, harbors, and other waterways are maintained and improved, and that they can continue to support economic growth and development. WRDA provides authority for the Army Corps of Engineers to carry out projects related to flood control, navigation, and environmental restoration. These projects are vital to protecting our communities from the devastating impacts of floods and other natural disasters, and they help to ensure that our waterways remain open and accessible to shipping and commerce. In addition, WRDA plays a critical role in protecting our environment and our natural resources. It provides authority for projects that restore wetlands, protect endangered species, and improve water quality. These projects are essential to preserving our natural heritage and ensuring the health and well-being of our communities.

WRDA supports economic growth, protects our environment, and ensures the safety and well-being of our communities. Congress must continue to support this legislation and provide the necessary authority to carry out these important projects. It is critical to U.S. port and exporter competitiveness that Congress continue enacting WRDA legislation every two years to minimize delays in updating this infrastructure to keep up with the demands of maritime commerce.

Port Tampa Bay, Florida's largest port, is a cornerstone in the state's supply chain, but our influence also extends far beyond state lines. The proposed deepening of our 47-mile-long shipping channel, a project awaiting the August Chief's Report from the Army Corps of Engineers, is more than a local enhancement.

It will upgrade national supply chain infrastructure which is a strategic move to reduce congestion in out-of-state ports and will also support the efficiency of national logistics. The deepening of the Tampa harbor will generate an average annual transportation benefit of \$88.5 million for the nation, according to the Army Corps' feasibility study. This project, however, hinges on the timely progression of the WRDA cycle. A delay in WRDA is not just a postponement of a project; it's a setback for our national economic interests, a ripple effect that slows our ability to advance towards a more prosperous and resilient future.

Our approach to development at Port Tampa Bay is not just about expansion but also about resiliency and responsible growth. We believe that our projects have shown a proven track record to this commitment. Port Tampa Bay supports an MSA with over 3.2 million people, the 17th largest in the country, in the nation's third most populous state. Nearly 70 percent of the 20 million cubic yards of the material dredged as a part of our deepened channel will be reused at a number of sites locally. For example, dredged material from the channel deepening will be repurposed for the restoration of Egmont Key, a national and historic treasure, and for the creation of new industrial land. A balanced approach ensures that while we grow, we also protect and enrich our environment.

As the Chairman of the AAPA, my testimony is given on behalf of state and local public agencies located along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts, the Great Lakes, and in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. For more than a century, AAPA membership has empowered port authorities to serve global customers and create economic and social value for their communities. Today in our nation's Capital, AAPA is representing ports on urgent and pressing issues facing our industry, promoting the common interests of the port community, and providing critical industry leadership on security, trade, transportation, infrastructure, environmental, and other issues related to port development and operations.

Port authorities are governmental entities that own facilities at one or more ports. While the roles of port authorities in port operations vary, most ports can be categorized as Operating Ports or Landlord Ports. Operating Ports own and construct port facilities, own cargo handling equipment, and hire labor to move cargo through port premises. At these operating ports, stevedores hire dockworkers to move cargo between ships and the dock. Landlord Ports, on the other hand, own the land and wharves of a port and lease these premises to our partners in the Marine Terminal Operator industry.

Our nation's seaports deliver vital goods to consumers, facilitate the export of American made goods, create jobs, and support local and national economic growth. Ports also play a crucial role in our national defense – a point acknowledged through the designation of 18 of our nation's ports as "strategic seaports" by the Department of Defense.

According to Martin Associates¹, an internationally recognized economic and transportation consulting firm, the total economic value generated in terms of revenue to businesses, personal income and economic output at U.S. coastal ports accounted for \$5.4 trillion, roughly 26 percent of GDP. This research also showed over 30.8 million Americans are employed in jobs generated because of port activity. Ports also generate significant tax revenue, with \$47.1 billion of direct, induced, and indirect federal, state and local tax revenue created through the economic activity taking place at ports across the nation. AAPA is currently conducting an updated Economic Impact Study and will share the results of the Study with the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure when it is completed in the spring of 2024.

Congress must unite in a bipartisan effort to reaffirm its commitment to this promise. Let us work together to ensure the timely passage of WRDA, not just for the benefit of Port Tampa Bay, but for every port, every state, and every citizen who relies on the seamless flow of goods and services that our ports facilitate.

¹ 2018 National Economic Impact of the U.S. Coastal Port System. (2019, March). http://aapa.files.cms-plus.com/Martin%20study_executive%20summary%202018%20US%20coastal%20port%20impacts%20final.docx

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your pivotal role in shaping the future of our nation's trade and infrastructure. It was an honor to have the opportunity to speak to you today.