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INTERIOR
BUDGET
DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

May 23, 2003

President George W. Bush
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write today out of a growing sense of frustration with your Administration's apparent reluctance to aggressively enhance security at our nation's seaports. Last year, more than a year after the September 11th terrorist attacks, Congress unanimously approved, and you wisely signed, the Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) to establish the nation's first federal guidelines for seaport security. Yet six months later, this landmark law remains dangerously underfunded.

As you well know, port security is of paramount importance to our nation's economic health. Our retailers, manufacturers, energy consumers, and agricultural interests depend heavily on our maritime commerce system. Last year's port labor-management dispute, which disrupted maritime commerce on the west coast, cost the nation an estimated \$2 billion per day. The economic disruption caused by a terrorist attack on our ports would be catastrophic, and currently, we have no reliable process in place to re-secure the system and reopen ports without jeopardizing the security of millions of Americans.

To date, this Administration's commitment to the nation's seaport security has been enormously disappointing. While you have proposed increases for the Coast Guard, which is still greatly overstretched and under-resourced, you have failed to propose any serious level of funding to implement the necessary port security mandates. Your budget proposal provides no meaningful increases in the budget for Customs-related law enforcement activity, offers only minimal funding for the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Maritime and Land office, and proposes no specific port security funding for state and local governments and port operators.

Additionally, cargo security programs are still in their infancy, infrastructure improvements are stalled, and government actions within the Department of Homeland Security are uncoordinated and undocumented. Because of these numerous concerns, Senator McCain and I have requested the General Accounting Office initiate a comprehensive, on-going investigation of the Administration's port security efforts.

Admiral James Loy recently sent a letter to our Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee announcing that TSA would seek to cover cost overruns in aviation security by transferring \$105 million that Congress dedicated for port security grants and \$28 million in funds for cargo security programs in Operation Safe Commerce. Given the profound consequences that would be associated with a port-related attack, this request is unacceptable.

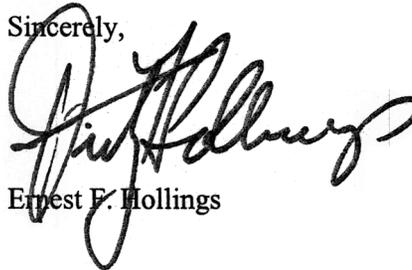
Therefore, I will work with members of the Appropriations Committee, who are committed to the protection of our seaports, to ensure that this transfer does not happen and that the Administration readily disburses the funding that we have all agreed is necessary to create a sound port security system.

We spend \$8 billion annually to ensure that we have the high-tech equipment capable of knocking a missile out of the sky, yet ironically, we spend comparatively little to stop a similar weapon of mass destruction delivered simply and clandestinely through one of the 6 to 8 million marine containers imported into the country each year. It makes no sense at all. We have to focus on the greatest vulnerabilities and risks, and a highly vulnerable port system is clearly one of the most significant homeland security risks conceivable.

Mr. President, as you well know, the threat of terrorism looms large, and once again, you have raised the terrorist threat alert to orange. I implore you to focus attention on seaport security and match that attention with the requisite funding commitment and the appropriate sense of urgency. Failing to do so is a recipe for disaster.

I look forward to working with you on this very urgent matter. The lives of millions of Americans and the nation's economic health are at stake.

Sincerely,



Ernest F. Hollings

cc: The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security

The Honorable Admiral James M. Loy
Under Secretary, Transportation Security Agency

The Honorable Asa Hutchinson
Under Secretary, Border and Transportation Security, Dept. Homeland Security

U.S. Senator Ted Stevens
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee

U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee

EFH/ad