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Port Caps Off 2020 with Big Legislative Win – Secures Historic Funding for the Region!

PORT OF HUENEME, CALIFORNIA, December 31, 2020 – As most eyes were focused on the coronavirus relief package this past week, ports all across America were waiting for President Trump to sign the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (WRDA). Included in the Act were provisions ensuring more funding would start flowing to the Port of Hueneme to maintain and improve the harbor, increasing the Port’s typical Harbor Maintenance Tax (HMT) funding by more than tenfold.

“As the pandemic has stretched our industry thin, the news of this increased funding is exactly what we need to continue making sure we can accommodate the vessels and cargo needed to keep our region recovering,” said Oxnard Harbor District President Jess J. Ramirez. “I would like to thank Congresswoman Julia Brownley for leading the charge, and Congressman Salud Carbajal and Congressman Mike Garcia for supporting this historic legislation.”

“Safe and secure water infrastructure is crucial to ensuring that our country and our economy keep moving forward,” said Congresswoman Julia Brownley. “In Ventura County, we know the importance of proper maintenance of our harbors and ports, which is critical for local businesses and for our way of life. I am also pleased that the bill included language I supported to ensure that donor ports, like the Port of Hueneme, receive a fair share of resources from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. The Port of Hueneme contributes far more than it receives back. Donor port equity will ensure that the Port of Hueneme – which is a key economic driver in our region — has resources to address infrastructure needs and keep goods flowing to fuel our local and regional economy.”



Since its enactment under President Reagan, the HMT Fund has been funded by a tax on imported cargo, certain domestic cargo, and on cruise vessels. Each year, Congress allocates a percentage of the collected tax for maintaining the harbors across the nation. However, not all collected taxes have been distributed each year, and instead have accumulated in the fund for use at a later time. Ports pushed for that time to be now, and it worked. The new legislation provides that 100% of HMT collected be spent each year, and requires that the unused remaining balance of the HMT Fund be expended by 2030. For Hueneme, this means an increase from \$140,000 annually to potentially over \$2 million by 2025.

“After several attempts to unlock the HMT Fund and bring more parity and exponentially more funding to Hueneme and California’s three other donor ports, we have finally succeeded!” Said Kristin Decas, CEO & Port Director. “This means more funding to keep our harbor well prepared to accommodate new vessels and keep our infrastructure in top shape. The diverse coalition to get this over the finish line is a true testament to how important our ports are in rebuilding and sustaining our nation’s economy.”

The nation’s nine donor ports, including the Port of Hueneme, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and San Diego, have long generated millions more in HMT revenues than they have ever received back for maintenance. In comparison, the majority of the nation’s other 270+ ports see a much higher percentage of their HMT funds come back to them for use in their specific harbors. Correcting this equity issue has been a top priority for the nation’s donor ports, energy transfer ports, and emerging harbors for the past decade.

This victory is a monumental step in the right direction as the ports will now need to advocate how the remaining decades-long unused balance of the HMT Fund will be allocated during the next Congressional appropriations process slated for early summer.

This historic achievement was accomplished through a large coalition spanning the nation and the political aisle led by the American Association of Port Authorities, the California Association of Port Authorities, California’s Congressional Delegation, and countless visits to Washington, D.C. by the Port’s Board of Harbor Commissioners.

The Port of Hueneme is one of the most productive and efficient commercial trade gateways for niche cargo on the West Coast. The Port is governed by five locally elected Port Commissioners. The Port moves \$10.85 billion in goods each year and consistently ranks among the top ten U.S. ports for automobiles and fresh produce. Port operations support the community by bringing \$1.7 billion in economic activity and creating 15,834 trade-related jobs. Trade through the Port of Hueneme generates more than \$119 million in direct and related state and local taxes, which fund vital community services. In 2017, the Port of Hueneme became the first port in California to become Green Marine certified.

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