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Leading the Way to Port Progress

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**PORT STAKEHOLDERS BLAST GAO STUDY
ON CHANNEL DEEPENING**

CAMDEN, N.J. – The Maritime Exchange for the Delaware River and Bay praised Delaware River port and organized labor officials for the points they raised at yesterday’s rally in support of the 45’ Delaware River Main Channel Deepening Project. “It is clear that if plans to create a modern shipping channel on the Delaware River do not proceed, the region can expect to lose jobs and local consumers can expect to pay more for the goods they buy,” said Exchange president Dennis Rochford.

At yesterday’s event Sal Candalaria, president of Local 1291 of the International Longshoremen’s Association, said, “They are cheating you out of your jobs.” He told a group that included dock workers, teamsters and port operators that because the port handles large quantities of food, building products and consumer goods, costs of those items would increase if the local port complex becomes uncompetitive. “The prices would increase for this entire region,” he said.

Supporting his comments were Local 1291 Secretary Marty Mascuilli and Frank Gillen, president of Teamster’s Joint Council 53, which represents 70,000 members in eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey . Mascuilli said organized labor should vote against any public official who does not support channel modernization.

Port Operator Thomas Holt said it is already difficult for the port to attract cargo ships because many of them must come up river partially loaded and must wait in the Delaware Bay for high tide. The situation will become worse, he said, as companies deploy ships that cannot use shallow ports. “Imagine for a minute if we had 100,000 people on unemployment,” he said.

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The labor-management group offered a sharp rebuke to Monday's federal government report that recommended a reevaluation of plans to create a modern shipping channel on the Delaware River. The rally took place at the South Jersey Port Corporation's Beckett Street Marine Terminal in front of the "Fair Winds," a ship that had to come up the river only partially loaded and had to wait for hours in the Delaware Bay for high tide. Port operators said those delays are becoming common on the river because the World War II-Era shipping channel is too shallow.

Monday's report by the General Accounting Office noted the plan to deepen the river channel from 40-feet to 45-feet meets all environmental requirements. But it questioned the economic justification and called for a new study using updated figures.

Calling the GAO statement "a totally flawed report," Delaware River Port Authority Chairman Manuel Stamatakis said the new analysis will show the economic benefits of a modern shipping channel. He said the GAO considered only one side of the ledger in reaching its conclusions; noting cargo that did not come into the port but discounting other cargo that did come. "This is not what I thought the GAO was all about," he said. "That is not the way to conduct an audit."

Speakers noted that if the Delaware River does not develop a modern shipping channel, it will become the shallowest port on the East Coast. Cargo that the port has worked hard to secure will shift to other ports that can meet the needs of ships that require deeper shipping channels.

"We shouldn't even be here, we should be out digging," said Capt. Michael Linton, president of the Pilots Association for the Bay and River Delaware. "We feel betrayed. The port is an important part of the lifeblood of the whole Delaware Valley."

The Maritime Exchange for the Delaware River and Bay is a non-profit association representing commercial maritime interests in the tri-state Delaware River port region.

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