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Maritime Industry Reacts: Bush Eliminates Steel Tariffs

FTSC Applauds President's Decision

PHILADELPHIA, PA – The long-anticipated decision regarding the termination of those steel tariffs imposed on foreign-made steel some 20 months ago came today. Just 11 days before the European Union was prepared to impose duties on U.S. exports if the tariffs were not lifted, White House officials announced the Bush administration would eliminate the Section 201 steel tariffs 16 months ahead of schedule.

The Free Trade In Steel Coalition (FTSC), whose members include more than 80 major U.S. port authorities and other maritime and transportation organizations, and more than 25 local longshore unions, has relentlessly promoted a national campaign to request the Bush administration repeal the Section 201 tariffs imposed by the President in March 2002. "The concerted effort by Coalition members in contacting the White House and requesting the termination of this program appears to have been successful," said Dennis Rochford, Coordinator, FTSC. "It has always been our position that these tariffs caused far more harm than good, and we thank and applaud President Bush for making the right decision."

The issue of the tariffs was somewhat unique in that it brought maritime labor and business leaders together in a fight to win reversal of a program the maritime community viewed as devastating to its economic well-being. "The fact of the matter is, not one single job was created and many jobs were lost," said Martin Mascuilli, Treasurer, ILA Local 1291, Philadelphia, citing the 29% reduction in steel shipments during 2003 and the resulting loss of $3.4 million in wages and fringe benefits. "We're happy to hear that the tariffs were eliminated, and we're looking forward to working more vessels laden with steel products from around the world at Delaware River ports."

Port officials and administrators from around the country praised Bush's decision. According to Wade Battles, Managing Director, Port of Houston Authority, "As a direct result of these tariffs, the Port of Houston experienced a reduction in steel imports, loss of business revenue, and jobs." Michael Dickens, ILA District Representative, South Atlantic and Gulf Coast District, sees that scenario now reversing for that area of the country. "I'm delighted with the President's decision, and believe it will allow us to put a lot of our people back to work."

At the Port of New Orleans, steel products are key commodities. "Our members were greatly disadvantaged by the President's policy," said James Campbell, President of ILA Local 3000 in New Orleans. "Today's decision means the return of steel ships to the Port of New Orleans, and a return to the workforce, hopefully within six months, for approximately one third of our members who are currently unemployed."

"Over 40% of the port's revenue is derived from the steel trade," said David P. Schulingkamp, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, "and the ripple effect of these tariffs has been extremely harmful to our region. Labor, business and port officials are grateful to President Bush for terminating this program. We've already heard from customers in Japan, Brazil and Europe, and they are all equally delighted with the President's decision."

According to Rochford, it is critical that organizations such as the FTSC remain vigilant and beware of any further actions that would artificially restrict the importation of steel products. "The FTSC is prepared to seize the momentum of today's victory. We will take whatever steps are necessary to solidly position our membership in a long term strategy designed to represent the best interests of the maritime and transportation industries as we move forward into 2004."

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