

AAPA Port Person(s) of the Year Acceptance Speech
Rep. Janice Hahn
Mar 19, 2013

Introduction:

Thank you, Chairman Ojard for that fine introduction. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kurt Nagle and all of you at the AAPA for the extraordinary work you do every day, raising awareness of the issues facing our ports, and championing their importance to our nation's economic prosperity.

PORTS Caucus:

Ted and I are honored to accept this prestigious award. It is a unique honor that we are the first to receive the Port Person of the Year award together. But while we both attended the same University, both come from port communities and both have a passion for the communities we represent, let's be honest-- we don't have much else in common. He's a judge from Texas! I am a teacher from California! Ted is a Republican and I am a Democrat, and in this town that means we rarely see eye to eye. Occasions of bipartisanship in this city are few and far between, especially now when our nation's troubles demand cooperation and compromise. But the fact that Ted and I are accepting this joint award in Washington D.C. is a testament to what can be done when common goals trump partisan labels.

As I mentioned, Ted and I are from port communities—the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are in my backyard and Ted lives near the Port of Houston. We have seen firsthand that ports play an integral role in providing good-paying jobs and sustaining our surrounding communities. But the impact of our ports reaches far beyond harbor communities, into the foundation of our economy and our national security.

When I came to Congress in 2011, I was surprised to find that ports, which had been such a big part of my work in my city council days, were not being discussed on the national stage. At a time when the nation was wrapped up in a debate about getting our economy back on track, ports were being left out of the conversation. Ted and I

recognized what you all at the AAPA had been saying for years, that ports are essential to economic growth, job creation and national security, and we teamed up to do something about it.

Ted and I put aside our differences to come together and form the bipartisan Congressional PORTS Caucus. We began reaching out to our colleagues on both sides of the aisle, encouraging them to join the Caucus to ensure that Congress would understand how the issues facing our seaports are integral to strengthening our economy and securing our nation.

Today, the PORTS Caucus is 81 members strong, with congressmen and women of both parties, many of whom do not even have a port in their district. In the past year, the Caucus has met with Secretary Ray LaHood, Vice Admiral Peter Neffenger and held briefings to educate members and staff alike on issues ranging from port security to maintenance funding.

We are incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together and we are looking to the Caucus's continuing success in spreading awareness of these issues.

We are making headway. I was extremely pleased when President Obama discussed the need to modernize our ports in his State of the Union address. I agree with the President's proposal to build collaborative partnerships that attract capital to help modernize ports, making goods move more efficiently. This will ensure America remains globally competitive.

Trade volume for marine ports is expected to double by 2021, and double again shortly after 2030. According to a recent study by the American Society of Civil Engineers, unless we get serious about our ports and waterways soon, we stand to lose \$700 billion in national GDP by 2020. These are serious challenges, but they are also opportunities that we can seize. Now is the time to start making smart investments in our most vital economic gateway.

That means putting our money where our mouth is. For years, the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund has built a multi-billion dollar surplus—even as so many ports across the nation have suffered from lack of investment. Common sense tells me there is a better way to manage and spend the trust fund, and it is critical that Congress works to better utilize these vital funds. That is why Ted and I have called on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to hold a hearing on this very subject and also why our caucus will be meeting with the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee to discuss the issue.

As a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I advocate for the critical infrastructure improvement need, both for the well-being of my community and the nation as a whole. This week, I will reintroduce the GAPS Act, legislation which passed the house last year, to identify any existing holes in our port security and plans to close them. I also will be introducing legislation to ensure the continuation of funding for vital port security programs as well as a resolution to honor the tremendous contributions of ports to the nation's economy.

Congress must get behind ports and implement policies that allow them to function to their highest ability. We did no one any favors in the latest sequestration debacle. Our inability to come together has meant senseless cuts to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, furloughs to thousands of custom agents and has resulted in significant delays at all of our ports. These delays mean congestion at our terminals and increased costs to both the trade community and consumers – weighing down our economy and hindering job growth.

Recently, I wrote a letter to the CBP, expressing deep concern about their latest decision to cut personnel overtime in the wake of sequestration. Such cuts hurt American families, cripples America's ports and unduly burdens our nation's economy. We cannot afford these cuts and we must come together to find a better solution. The political gridlock in DC cripples our democracy.

But as the PORTS Caucus reveals, there is an opportunity for bipartisan dialogue. Ted and I recently were hosted by our alma mater Abilene Christian University for a rich discussion with a group of students on civil discourse and politics. I hope that my friendship with Ted is proof, that we can find common ground in this town and still remain true to the interests of our constituents.

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for this award. It is indeed a wonderful honor.