

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 2, 2015

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

Now that the contract negotiations between labor and management at the west coast ports have ended, we ask you to increase staffing of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel at the Ports of Seattle, Tacoma, Long Beach, and Los Angeles to ensure that the backlog of containers can be processed expeditiously. We also ask that you work with us to make funding upgrades to U.S. port infrastructure a priority. Efficient ports are key to American competitiveness and to boosting U.S. exports.

Since a tentative agreement between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) was reached at the end of last month, the ports have made progress processing cargo, but a backlog persists. According to port officials in Los Angeles and Long Beach, dozens of ships with thousands of cargo containers are waiting to be unloaded, and clearing them will take three months. There are fewer cargo ships anchored in the Puget Sound, but companies still assume it will take between two and three months for Seattle's backlog to be cleared. Additional CBP personnel at these ports will increase the number of inspections that can be completed and speed up the processing of the containers.

Port capacity and efficiency are critical to American companies' ability to compete in a global economy. Unfortunately, our ports are simply incapable of accommodating the growing flows of imports and exports. The tentative contract agreement between the ILWU and the PMA will address short-term productivity issues, but congestion will continue to plague all major U.S. ports unless they are modernized and expanded. We appreciate that the President's fiscal year 2016 budget included additional resources to hire and train up to 2,000 new CBP officers to process and inspect passengers and cargo at our ports, but we need to make significant investments in our port infrastructure to maintain U.S. competitiveness in the 21st century.

We urge you to increase CBP personnel at west coast ports quickly so the backlog of containers can be processed. In addition, we ask you to work with us to make investments in U.S. port infrastructure a priority. Thank you for your consideration of this letter, and we look forward to working with you to boost American competitiveness.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator