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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 12, 2017

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The Honorable Richard Spencer
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4D652
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Spencer,

We are writing to expand the dialogue with the U.S. Navy regarding the need to widen the shipping channels in the Hampton Roads area that provide access to both The Port of Virginia and Naval Station Norfolk. House Report 114-537, which accompanied the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, encouraged the Navy to work with The Port of Virginia on this important issue and asked your office to keep Congress updated on the changes in commercial traffic volume and patterns at The Port of Virginia, as well as the potential impact on the Navy's operations.

As you know, Naval Station Norfolk is the world's largest naval base, supporting 75 ships and 134 aircraft alongside 14 piers and 11 aircraft hangars. It is of enormous strategic importance to the nation given it hosts the largest concentration of U.S. Navy forces in the country, and the Commonwealth of Virginia has always been proud to support this role. Similarly, the Port of Virginia is the fifth largest commercial port in the nation and among the fastest growing on the U.S. East Coast with the ability to provide goods to two-thirds of the U.S. population within 24 hours. The port has taken strategic steps to invest in infrastructure to build capacity needed to meet rising and record-setting volumes, such as the expansion of semi-automatic container management.

Since the House report, The Port of Virginia received the first container vessel to transit the newly expanded Panama Canal which set a record as the largest vessel to call the East Coast with a capacity just over 10,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs). That record has been eclipsed numerous times since, culminating with the CMA-CGM *Theodore Roosevelt* which called in August. At over 14,400 TEUs, it is one of 11 similarly-sized vessels on a weekly service, including its sister ship the *John Adams*.

The recent consolidation of major container ship lines and expansion of the Panama Canal has resulted in ship lines deploying Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs), like the *Theodore Roosevelt* and *John Adams*, to exploit economies of scale. Growth in trade and the expanded Panama Canal means that these larger ships are calling U.S. ports more frequently.

Those ships are up to 1,200 feet in length and 160 feet in breadth, which is 235 feet longer and 54 feet wider than the previous class of Panamax vessels – and larger than the newest class of aircraft carriers.

Accommodating these ships requires deeper and wider channels, to include Thimble Shoal Channel that support Naval Station Norfolk and the Port of Virginia. Under current conditions, the transit of an ULCV results in U.S. Coast Guard restrictions of one-way traffic through the channel. This directly impacts commerce, by causing port congestion, as well as U.S. Navy operations and readiness.

Accordingly, on November 8, 2017, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers published a draft report recommending that the Thimble Shoal Channel be widened from 1,000 to 1,200 feet to create meeting areas for vessel traffic on either side of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel; additional modeling continues to investigate widening the channel up to 1,400 feet. Under current proposals under consideration by the Army Corps of Engineers, widening of the channel may not be complete until 2027. As commercial vessels continue to increase in size, the need to widen the channel to ensure the continued safe and efficient commercial and military transits will only increase. While coordination and business rules can lessen the impact, the only long-term and sustainable solution is to widen the channel.

As the port and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continue to work together to deepen and widen the channels through the Civil Works process, we encourage you to support the Environmental Assessment process and provide prompt input to this evaluation effort. Navy support as to the importance of this shared use effort, in addition to the Army Corps' Civil Works process, will help accelerate completion of the project and ensure that interruptions to Navy operations and requirements are minimized.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Should you have any questions, please contact Austin Walton at Austin.Walton@mail.house.gov or Cody McClelland at Cody.McClelland@mail.house.gov.

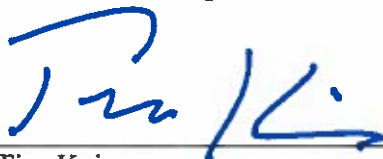
Sincerely,



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



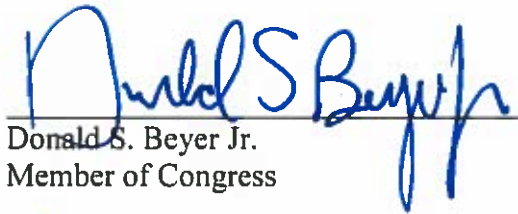
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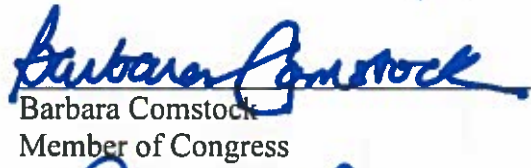


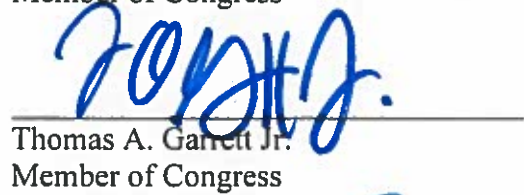
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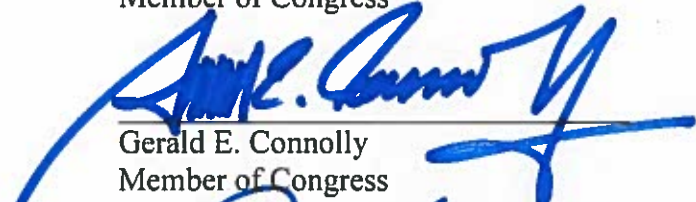

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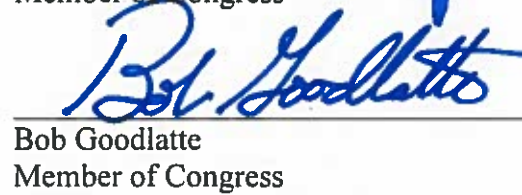

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