

**STATEMENT OF**  
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**BEFORE THE**  
**COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS SUBCOMMITTEE ON**  
**TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**UNITED STATES SENATE**  
**WATER RESOURCES: THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS**

**May 9, 2017**

Good afternoon, Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Cardin and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the importance of Funding for the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain navigation channels and jetties at small ports in the Pacific Northwest, and around the country.

I'm here from Bandon, Oregon, which has a population of 3,307. I have been a commercial fisherman for most of my life. I'm a small business owner. And I'm currently running for my third term as a port commissioner in the Port of Bandon. I should be home preparing my boat for its annual maintenance but I have something I need to talk with you about.

I've been involved in the seafood business from research to retail for most of the past 50 years. As a commercial fisherman I've crossed every bar from San Francisco to Canada at one time or another. Now I fish primarily for tuna off of Oregon and Washington. Our region's tuna fleet includes about 600 boats that fish tuna off Oregon and Washington.

My brother and I pack our boat with supplies for two weeks at a time and spend most of that time between 100 and 200 miles off shore. Because our boats are only capable of about 7 knots in heavy weather, and because we are so far offshore, if unsafe weather is forecasted, we must go into whatever harbor is closest. If the forecast is wrong, we can be in a situation where our only course is downwind to whatever port is on that trajectory. This is where the term "safe harbor" comes from. When weather is bad, any harbor, big or small, is safer than being at sea.

So from a fisherman's perspective EVERY port, large and small, is important. Do we have preferences? Yes. The main reason we have preferences is the safety of the bar.

The term "bar" may not be familiar to everyone here, but for people in the Pacific Northwest that take boats out into the ocean, understanding of this term is a matter of life or death. Bar is the term used for the point where the harbor entrance, in my region normally near the mouth of a river, forms a "hump" where sediment builds up as the downstream river water comes up against

the ocean waves. During ebb tides, river and tidal flows combine to create a stronger current that comes up against the incoming ocean swell. If the swell is large enough and the bar is shallow enough the energy of the swell is tipped-over resulting in a “breaker”. Breakers are dramatically steeper than the swell and the life threatening danger is when a boat is attempting to come into the entrance, and the boat encounters a “sneaker” wave that is larger than expected – the wave steepens, and the boat goes out of control as it essentially turns into a surfboard, goes broadside and rolls over. This dangerous condition is referred to as a “breaking bar”.

It wasn't until I came to D.C. the first time advocating for dredging of the bars of our small ports that I realized breaking bars is a phenomenon mostly unique to the Pacific Northwest. Until that realization dawned I couldn't understand how budget-after-budget could zero out small port dredging when so many lives, let alone livelihoods, depend on minimizing the threat of breaking bars.

There are a couple of ways to minimize the threat of a breaking bar. One way is for the Army Corp of Engineers to build jetties that steer the current a few degrees off the dominant swell direction. This was done on every bar in the Pacific Northwest many, many decades ago, but today, most of those jetties are in dire need of repair and are getting less and less effective. Another way to minimize the deadliness of a breaking bar is to regularly dredge out the sediment that builds up every year from the torrential rains that characterize the Pacific Northwest coast.

There is one thing that both of these have in common, and that is funding. The Portland District of the Army Corp of Engineers does a fantastic job of maintaining our jetties and dredging our navigation channels given the resources made available to them by Congress. But when sufficient funding for these activities is not available, as is often the case for small ports, the bar shallows, and breaks, and inevitably, lives are lost.

For me, safety is paramount. But for thousands of others, funding for dredging and jetty maintenance is tied to their economic livelihood.

Oregon's ports and harbors rank amongst our state's most valuable assets and are critical to maintaining and creating jobs across our great state. In Oregon there are 15 communities with small ports with ocean access. In every one of those communities the port is the equivalent of their anchor business. These small ports are hubs for international trade, recreation, and commercial fishing — each more important than ever to the economic health of Oregon's communities. In rural counties, port activities provide an important employment base and are often primary drivers of local prosperity.

The Port of Bandon is a case study for this. Our port attracts approximately 300 vessels per year, and has gained a strong tourism presence through sport-fishing and recreational crabbing. Tourists enjoy a full range of recreational activities including full marina facilities, crab docking, scenic river walk and nature pathway, amphitheater and a new boardwalk.

The Bandon Marina includes a public boat ramp and 90 moorage slips that are typically occupied, especially in the summer months. The Oregon State Marine Board estimates that there were 23,377 boating related trips in the Coquille Bay during 2011. That number excludes a

greater number of land-based crabbers, fisherman and visitors that accompany Coquille Bay boaters. In addition to the Bandon Marina, crab dock and boat launch, the Port of Bandon owns several real estate holdings that provide lease space for businesses. A Coast Guard motor lifeboat is based in the Port marina during summer months.

The Port of Bandon along with approximately 54 port-related businesses employs an estimated 484 workers. This includes a charter service, a bait shop, two fish markets, two marine insurance businesses, as well as numerous restaurants and hotels. We contracted a study in 2014 of the impact of our port on the local economy. It found that 62 million dollars (\$35.1 million direct and \$27 million indirect/induced) of economic benefit is generated annually by our port as the result of the funding that allows the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain our navigation channels and jetties.

This story is repeated up and down the Oregon coast, and around the country. Most of this impact can be tied directly to funding for annual maintenance dredging and maintenance of our jetty infrastructure. If these ports are not maintained, these economic numbers would plummet, and the coastal economy would be in worse shape than it already is.

Operation and Maintenance of our nation's navigation infrastructure is a Federal responsibility. In rural counties, where most of America's small ports are located, port activities provide an important employment base and are often primary drivers of local prosperity. Our ports are home to fishing fleets, marinas and recreational facilities, and are critical to maintaining and creating jobs.

Chronic underfunding by Congress of Federal Army Corps of Engineers operations and maintenance activities for small ports around the country is causing our water infrastructure to deteriorate, impacting safety and reducing America's economic competitiveness. Unless something is done soon, the navigation channels leading to our nation's ports will silt in and the jetties protecting our communities will crumble.

I have been encouraged by efforts in Congress to ensure that all of the money that goes into the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) every year is used to fund Army Corps of Engineers dredging and jetty maintenance. However, we on Oregon's coast are concerned that this will not happen quickly enough. Many of our nation's ports may have long-since silted in by the time money is available. This funding is needed now.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about what funding means to me, my community, and to rural communities around the country. I have included additional documentation to support my testimony, including an illustration of the breaking bar that I described in my testimony, and a chart that provides additional detail about the dangers of breaking bars in the Pacific Northwest.

I know it may not make sense to you but if everything you have is wrapped up in your boat, and your boat feeds your family, you go fishing. Even when everything is optimal some of us don't make it home. I'm here asking you to give us the best chance you can, so we can make it in, and home, to our families.