

Texas Ports Are on the Rise

By: Sen. Lois W. Kolkhorst



As the state Senator for seven coastal counties and over a third of the Texas coastline, I was honored when Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick asked me to serve on the newly created Senate Select Committee on Texas Ports. I'm thankful for the opportunity to help the vital coastal and inland water networks within my district and across Texas.

The impact of our ports does not stop at the water's edge. In fact, Texas ports have a major impact on our local and statewide economies, reportedly generating around \$82 billion in personal

income and 1.4 million jobs.

The committee will focus on what our ports must do to remain competitive. We simply must look at the recent Panama Canal expansion and how it has altered modern shipping. It is imperative for Texas to take the appropriate steps to modernize our port network so that we can continue to compete on an international playing field. By investing in our maritime trade networks, we can attract larger amounts of commerce to ensure that Texas' economy remains strong.

So much of our future success hinges on the

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development of inland ports to facilitate the flow of goods into and from coastal areas. For example, I recently had the opportunity to tour the Port of Victoria to discuss the economic impact that it will have on Senate District 18 and the state of Texas. It's an honor to represent the Port of Victoria, which is considered a leading economic engine for the Texas Gulf Coast. Going forward, it is poised to continue to grow with the state's industrial giants, which are engaged in

billions of dollars of current and future infrastructure investments along this stretch of the Texas coast.

The Port of Victoria has come a long way since it began in 1968 when the 35-mile Barge Canal to Victoria was completed to a navigable depth of 9 feet and a width of 100 feet. Today, that port is not only wider and deeper, it is rightfully considered a center for the chemical, construction, steel fabrication and agribusiness industries offering access to all modes of transportation.

Recently, the Port of Victoria attracted attention when it was named as one of four sites being considered for a multibillion-dollar petrochemical complex proposed by ExxonMobil and Saudi Arabia Basic Industries Corporation. I have personally visited with port officials and have faith that they are fully committed to handling this project. The mere fact that a relatively small port can step up and compete on a global stage says so much about the future of our region. The improvements made to the property in recent years by adding liquid cargo docks, general cargo docks, roadways and rails are clearly paying off.

The infrastructure improvements made at the Port of Victoria should serve as an example of what Texas ports need to do to prepare for the future. It's not only a gateway to the Gulf, but to markets across the world, from Mexico to South America and beyond.



With the Panama Canal expansion, the opportunities are limitless for our Texas ports, and I am dedicated to helping all of them with the Senate Select Committee on Texas Ports. If you are interested in our work, the committee will meet again on September 15 at the Texas State Capitol. In the meantime, I look forward to working with all of my friends across Senate District 18 to grow our economy and keep our port communities thriving.

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About the author: In December 2014, Lois W. Kolkhorst was elected to the Texas Senate in a special election, after previously serving 14 years in the Texas House. She represents all or part of 21 Texas counties.

Texas Ports Are Leading the Way

By: Mike Sizemore



grant funding this past year, but a more permanent solution is needed.

The connectivity and infrastructure of ports, roads and rail are critical to the safe, efficient transport of goods. The Texas Legislature created the Port Access Account Fund in 2001 in Chapter 55 of the Texas Transportation Code to help invest in port infrastructure by creating jobs, facilitating the safe and efficient transport of much needed goods, and extending the life and viability of taxpayer investment in roads and bridges. The problem is the Port Access Account has never been funded. It's an issue that comes up every legislative session, yet leadership has been unable on the state level to fund it when it comes to Texas ports. Hopefully that is now changing with the newly created Senate Select Committee on Texas Ports.

Legislators have begun to realize the economic importance of Texas ports and have started hearings to determine what's needed for our future. Energy analysts expect global energy demand to grow by 25 percent in the next 20 years, and the energy industry in Texas can help meet that demand with crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports. Texas ports and the energy industry can work together to continue the expansion of our economy. Eagle Ford Shale oil provided the catalyst for the Port of Victoria to rapidly expand in recent years, and leadership from the Victoria County Navigation District Commissioners made it happen with a visionary plan for the future.

In addition to energy and other exports, the Panama Canal expansion will bring about more imports and long-term economic expansion in Texas if our ports are ready. It cannot be overstated that additional funding without new user fees is necessary to keep Texas ports competitive with neighboring gulf coast ports. Texas Sen. Lois W. Kolkhorst recently toured the Port of Victoria and other ports on a fact-finding mission to understand the current impact of maritime ports and the potential for the future.

The future of the Texas economy is bright, and Texas maritime ports will continue to provide leadership and play a vital role in our economic expansion. Texas ports, the legislature and industry can work together to keep our transportation network second to none in getting goods to Texas consumers and Texas exports to the global marketplace.

Texas ports have lead the way in the expansion of the Texas economy and the overall economic impact on all Texans. Marine cargo activity at public marine terminals in Texas accounts for nearly \$300 billion in total economic activity according to an economic impact study done in 2011. More than 1 million jobs and up to 25 percent of the Texas economy rely on maritime ports. Port officials from Brownsville to Corpus Christi, Victoria to Houston, Beaumont, and every port in between have been providing leadership to grow their ports, tax base, jobs and economic output. They have done so without any help from the state of Texas, despite immense competition from other gulf coast states that invest millions of dollars into their port infrastructures each year. For the first time the Texas Department of Transportation awarded

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TEXAS PORTS AND THE ENERGY INDUSTRY CAN WORK TOGETHER TO CONTINUE THE EXPANSION OF OUR ECONOMY



About the author: After more than 30 years of experience in television, media, public policy, and politics, Mike Sizemore began Sizemore Media & Consulting in January 2007. Sizemore is a former award-winning broadcast Journalist and television News Director for ABC and NBC network affiliates in Texas and New Mexico. He left his television career to become the Press Secretary and District Director for Texas State Sen. Ken Armbrister. During his more than 15 years working in the Texas Senate, he worked on issues relating to water, education, transportation and other issues important to Texas.