

## OPINION

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OPEN FORUM *On Labor Agreements*

Paul Chinn / The Chronicle 2016

If dockworkers and shippers agree to extend the current contract through 2022, the 29 West Coast ports, which support upwards of 9 million U.S. jobs while moving cargo worth trillions of dollars, could stay competitive. Oakland is the fourth-busiest of the ports, after Los Angeles, Long Beach and Tacoma.

# Keep 29 West Coast ports open

## Contract extension would support jobs and trade

By Mickey Kantor and Norman Mineta

Twice in the last 15 years, labor disputes between dockworkers and the maritime companies that employ them have led to severe disruptions at West Coast ports. Now these parties have an opportunity to preserve labor peace and solidify West Coast trade for the foreseeable future. Doing so would be good for workers, good for the industry and good for the millions of Americans whose jobs depend on trade.

This summer, International Longshore and Warehouse Union members from Southern California to the Pacific Northwest will vote on a proposal that would extend their current labor contract through 2022. It would raise wages, preserve virtually no-cost health care coverage and increase pensions

— all at a time when unions nationwide are facing challenging headwinds.

Approving this contract would send a strong signal to retailers, manufacturers and others who rely on the ports that the West Coast intends to remain competitive, despite slipping market share in recent years. It would also reward dockworkers by raising base wages to more than \$46 per hour, while preserving no-premium health insurance that features \$1 prescriptions, and increase pensions to a maximum of more than \$95,000 per year, according to news reports.

Among those who would breathe a sigh of relief would be West Coast agricultural growers, whose trade association reported that sales to Asian markets were down as much as 25 percent during the latest disruption in 2014-2015.

Also impacted were automakers and other manufacturers, as well as retailers — large and small — across the country.

The stakes are high in markets from Washington state to Southern California. An estimated 2 in 5 Washington-state-area jobs are connected to international trade. In Southern California, the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach support enormous economic activity, and are investing \$6.5 billion in capital projects toward a clean and reliable future for this crucial international gateway.

The Port of Oakland is the fourth-busiest of the 29 West Coast ports, ranking behind Los Angeles, Long Beach and Tacoma.

A report by maritime economist John Martin estimates that West Coast ports support upwards of 9 million American jobs. The cargo moving through these ports has a value in the trillions of dollars, supporting a healthy chunk of U.S. Gross Domestic Product.

Strong West Coast ports are also important for the environ-

ment. California and Washington ports are leading the way to reduce harmful emissions from ships, and by updating cargo terminals with the latest in low-impact environmental technology. That means electric yard equipment, more on-dock rail and other advances toward green terminals. In this case, environmental and economic growth can go hand in hand.

Few Americans understood the huge impacts of maritime trade on the national economy before the 2002 port shutdown, in which West Coast ports were shuttered for 10 days until President George W. Bush ordered them re-opened. The subsequent disruptions during the last contract talks — which once again required federal intervention — have left some wondering if the relationship between ILWU dockworkers and their employers, represented by the Pacific Maritime Association, is permanently broken.

Given the current political climate, there are those in Washington who have considered extreme solutions that

would handcuff future negotiators and transfer local decision-making to Washington, D.C.

Such proposals would no doubt gather steam if the contract proposal is rejected, likely leading to acrimonious talks again in two years. Yet by agreeing to a contract extension now, workers and their bosses can show that no such intervention is needed, and that the West Coast can continue to be a thriving and vital trade hub with a stable and reliable workforce.

It is rare to have an opportunity in which workers, industry and the U.S. economy can all so clearly be winners. This is one such opportunity. At a time of much uncertainty, passage of this contract would be a step in the right direction.

*Mickey Kantor served as both U.S. trade representative and secretary of commerce. Norman Mineta, who represented San Jose in Congress for two decades, served as both secretary of commerce and secretary of transportation.*