

WASHINGTON, DC – House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD) released the following statement today in response to President Bush's visit to the Port of Baltimore. As the only member from Maryland serving on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Hoyer has secured millions of dollars to keep the Port viable.

“The Port of Baltimore is a significant economic engine for our state and presently supports nearly 115,400 jobs in the State of Maryland, generates more than \$1.4 billion for the State and regional economies and represents one-tenth of Maryland's gross state product.

“We must defend our nation against terrorists by adopting a comprehensive plan to protect our major ports and borders and prevent terrorist infiltration. It is critical that we protect and maintain points of entry like the Baltimore Harbor to insure their continued economic viability.

“Regrettably, the Republican Party has underfunded this national security priority leaving our ports vulnerable and without the necessary security improvements identified by the U.S. Coast Guard. On July 1, 2004, U.S. port facilities were required to comply with a comprehensive set of security regulations issued by the U.S. Coast Guard after September 11. The Coast Guard estimates that these security regulations will cost ports \$540 million a year.

“However, the most recent round of port security grants from the Department of Homeland Security will provide our ports with \$140 million – total. This is \$400 million less than the Coast Guard's estimated need and will not get the job done.

“The Intelligence Community has warned of the possibility of terrorists attacking the United States by using a container to smuggle people or weapons into the country on a ship, truck, or airplane. But the majority of containers are sealed with tags that do not prevent access to containers and fewer than 6% are X-rayed for weapons of mass destruction or dangerous material when they arrive in the United States.

“Furthermore, the \$6 million machine unveiled by Gov. Ehrlich that the President saw today is only an X-ray machine. It cannot detect radiological or nuclear materials. As of June 2005, only one port in the United States has the capacity to screen all containers for weapons of mass destruction.

“Despite these threats, there are no minimum standards for container security. There is no process for verifying who filled a container at the point of loading and who is handling a container as it is shipped from a factory in another country to the U.S.

“Our highest duty is to protect the American people, defend our homeland and strengthen our national security. I hope that in his visit to Baltimore, the President not only recognizes how essential this Port is to our nation’s economy, but also truly commits to immediately provide adequate funding for security needs at the Port of Baltimore and ports across the country. We must do what is necessary to protect the American people and our homeland from another attack.”

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