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## **2009 MTD Executive Board Meeting**

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*February 26-27, 2009*

*Miami, Florida*

### **PORT DREDGING**

*(submitted by the International Union of Operating Engineers)*

America is in the midst of an infrastructure crisis. From serious deterioration of local roads to bridge collapses, from schools with leaking ceilings to the need for Internet access for all, many infrastructure project needs are fairly visible to the average person.

However, we in the maritime industry know of one major concern that has been ignored for way too long: port dredging.

Almost all goods that enter or exit the United States do so through a harbor. Waterborne commerce is the umbilical cord to the nation's international trade. Yet, many of the channels needed by commercial vessels to transit America's ports are covered with sediment and other debris.

In fact, the Army Corps of Engineers recently analyzed 59 of the busiest commercial channels within the U.S. and discovered half of them were available at their authorized depth or width for less than one-third of the year. What this means is vessels laden with American-made goods cannot carry all they are capable of holding because they would be too heavy to keep from running aground, nor can ships with imports for the U.S.-market enter due to the same concerns.

The unfortunate reality is America has had an effective way to deal with this national problem. However, Congress has not shown the political will to pass the necessary legislation to resolve this matter. Since 2003, the U.S. has appropriated fewer dollars on dredging projects than the annual amounts collected by the Harbor Maintenance Tax. As of Fiscal Year 2007, the Harbor Maintenance Tax Fund had a surplus of \$4.7 billion – money that is waiting to be used to dredge ports on a regular basis thus allowing commerce to flow more smoothly.

The International Union of Operating Engineers calls upon its fellow affiliates within the Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO to urge Congress to pass legislation that would compel Harbor Maintenance Tax appropriations to more closely mirror the tax's annual revenues. Similar language has been passed in previous Congresses

concerning the proper use of Highway Trust Fund and Aviation Trust Fund revenues for their designated forms of transportation.

With America mired in an economic downturn, there is no need for America's ports to literally run international trade aground because available dollars weren't released to provide needed and regular dredging of the nation's commercial waterways. Thousands of good-paying American jobs would be created by expending Harbor Maintenance Taxes for their intended purpose: dredging America's harbors and waterways.

