

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2015

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Seaports serve as gateways to domestic and international commerce, connecting U.S. businesses, workers, and consumers to the global marketplace. West Coast ports, in particular, are key hubs for international trade, handling nearly half of all U.S. maritime imports and exports, including inputs for manufactures in Nebraska and across the United States.

Freight infrastructure, such as railroads, inland waterways, and highways, is essential to the efficient flow of goods through our nation's ports. Service interruptions at our nation's ports could significantly disrupt our national transportation supply chain, sending ripples through the U.S. economy.

As you may know, on June 30, 2014, the contract between International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) expired. Negotiations between the ILWU and PMA began in mid-May 2014; inability to come to an agreement led to a longstanding contract negotiations dispute. On February 20, 2014, the ILWU and PMA announced a tentative deal. Throughout the nine-month dispute, stalled negotiations caused widespread delays in cargo movement, inventory shortfalls at retail stores, crop losses to agriculture producers, and input delivery delays to manufacturers. Reports suggested that West Coast ports delays caused a six to eight week backlog in cargo processing. It will take months for the West Coast ports operations to return to normal.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security, I am requesting that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) examine the following questions:

- What are the implications of disruptions at West Coast Ports for various industries (e.g., agriculture, retail, manufacturing)? I am particularly interested in learning of any increased transportation costs, inventory shortfalls, or market share losses.

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- How have shifts to alternative transportation modes, including truck, rail, inland waterways, or aviation, affected industry supply chains?
- What are the costs and impacts of regional changes in freight movements due to the West Coast ports slowdown, including shifts to southern or eastern U.S. ports and Canadian and Mexican ports?
- What is the current condition of infrastructure at our West Coast ports? What is the status of its ability to withstand future disruptions to port operations?

I look forward to your investigation of the impact of service disruptions at West Coast ports on our nation's intermodal transportation network. I request that GAO complete and submit this report within 18 months of receipt of this letter.

Should you need further information, please contact Bobby Fraser in my office by phone at 202-224-5358 or by email at [Bobby\\_Fraser@Fischer.Senate.gov](mailto:Bobby_Fraser@Fischer.Senate.gov).

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Deb Fischer  
United States Senator