Reps. Hahn, Poe push pro-port policies

Premium

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Rep. Janice Hahn, founder of the PORTS Caucus on Capitol Hill, said Tuesday she will re-introduce port security legislation this week, sponsor new legislation to ensure continued funding of for key port security programs and offer a resolution to honor the contributions of ports to the nation's economy.

Those types of efforts and the creation of the PORTS Caucus to educate members of Congress about the importance of ports to U.S. national and economic security led the American Association of Port Authorities to honor her and Caucus co-founder Ted Poe, R-Texas, as recipients of its 2013 "Port Person of the Year Award."

Hahn

"Congress must get behind ports and implement policies that allow them to function to their highest ability," Hahn said in her acceptance speech at the AAPA's spring conference in Washington.

Last year, the House passed Hahn's Gauging American Port Security (GAPS) Act that would direct the Department of Homeland Security to study and report to Congress on gaps in port security and how to address them. Hahn, a California Democrat whose district includes the Port of Los Angeles, said she will bring the legislation forward again in hopes that it will get through the House and Senate.

Hahn expressed support for full expenditure of money in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, which is carrying a surplus in excess of $7 billion because Congress has only appropriated about half the import tax receipts on ocean containers for dredging, jetty repair and other maintenance of navigable waterways necessary for large commercial vessels to efficiently access harbors. The rest of the money is kept on the federal books as an accounting maneuver to make the deficit look smaller.

Poe and Hahn have asked the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to hold a hearing on using the Harbor Maintenance Tax for its intended purpose and the PORTS Caucus will meet with the Water Resources and Environment subcommittee to discuss the issue, Hahn said.

Formation of the PORTS Caucus demonstrates that politicians on opposite sides of the political spectrum - Poe is a conservative Republican from Texas and Hahn a liberal Democrat from California - can come together to address important national needs, Hahn said.

"Occasions of bipartisanship in this city are few and far between, especially now when our nation's economic future hinges on cooperation and compromise. The fact that Ted and I are accepting this joint award in Washington, D.C. is a testament to what can be achieved when common goals trump partisan labels," she said.

Poe

Poe, who represents the Port of Houston and before redistricting was the primary champion for the ports of Beaumont and Arthur, said there is a constant need to reeducate members of Congress, especially in the House, about the importance of ports because there has been so much turnover in recent years. Many legislators are learning for the first time about how ports enable the economy to grow and the PORTS Caucus is playing an important role in raising awareness about ports, he said.

The PORTS Caucus has grown to 81 members within 18 months.

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The funding problems for maintenance dredging are "frustrating," Poe agreed, as is the length of time it takes for engineering and environmental studies necessary to advance new deepening projects. The bureaucratic delays increase the costs of projects, he said.

Poe also advocated for policies that will make possible the export of liquefied natural gas through ports now that the United States has become a major producer of gas. Trade of any type will create more U.S. jobs, he added.

The federal government is currently reviewing 16 applications for 16 LNG export facilities. - Eric Kulisch

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