

As the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks approaches, we would like to take a moment to reflect on those who lost their lives in the tragedy five years ago, as well as the men and women of the U.S. military who have sacrificed so much since that time in service of their country.

Their dedication and courage has been truly inspiring.

The past five years have been a difficult time for our nation and its people as we have readjusted to the threat posed by anti-Western, global terrorist groups. While there is still much work to be done to secure and defend our nation, we have made a great deal of progress. The same can be said of U.S. seaports, including the Port of Long Beach.

As the 9/11 anniversary approaches we expect to see a spotlight on seaport security issues. The discussion is likely to lean heavily toward the practices and projects that still need to be done, such as a universal ID card for port workers and a greater expansion of cargo inspection systems. That focus tends to foster the erroneous belief that little is being done to protect our nation's seaports.

We agree that much more can be done – port security is and will always be a work in progress. At the same time, it's important to note how much has been accomplished in the past five years to keep our ports, port workers and surrounding communities safe.

Our cargo security systems have changed tremendously. Seaport security now begins overseas, before cargo is loaded on to vessels bound for the United States. All incoming containerized cargo – 100 percent – is profiled for security risks by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, a division of Homeland Security, while it is still overseas. All containers flagged as high-risk are physically inspected at foreign ports.

Once a ship is at sea, the U.S. Coast Guard continues to review manifest information on the cargo and crew. Coast Guard "boarding teams," with bomb-sniffing dogs, have the authority to board a ship at sea for any reason. When a ship docks on our shores, U.S. Customs officials conduct another level of analysis to determine if any cargo warrants further inspection. The radiation portal monitors installed at all of our international cargo container terminals provide a final safeguard against potentially dangerous materials.

Meanwhile, our own Long Beach Harbor Patrol, in conjunction with the Long Beach Police Department, is working vigilantly around the clock to protect the Port's land and facilities. Among other efforts, our Harbor Department Security Division has expanded the port's video surveillance systems, increased the number of marine helicopter patrols and improved our diving inspection capabilities. The safety of our administration building has been increased through the placement of barriers and fences, ID checks and the presence of officers

near the front entrance. Our Security Division is also updating the port's emergency management plan and evacuation procedures.

Several important programs that aren't as visible to the public, such as Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism, Operation Safe Commerce, and the Container Security Initiative (which places U.S. Customs agents at foreign seaports) are building further safeguards into the global goods movement industry.

What also tends to go unnoticed are the many contributions from our port workers toward creating a safer environment -- from employees in our Administration Building and maintenance facility to our federal, state and local government partners, terminal operators and workers in the longshore union. Since 9/11 we have all become security personnel, by heightening our awareness, watching for irregularities and generally being the "eyes and ears" of the port as we go about our daily business.

Some degree of risk will always exist in the open, free systems of commerce that have made the United States one of the most prosperous nations on Earth. However, we want to assure everyone that the Port of Long Beach and our seaport security partners, at every step of the global supply chain, are working diligently to minimize that risk.

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