Ecology South

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Sens. Brown, Portman Call on Obama Administration to

Tap Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund to Immediately

Begin Repairs on Ohio’s Lake Erie Harbors

Brown Calls for Full Use of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for Maintenance of the Nation’s

Harbors

**Wednesday, August 15, 2012**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rob Portman (R-OH) today urged the Obama Administration to

utilize the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund to begin repairs on Ohio’s Lake Erie Harbors. In a letter to Jeffrey D. Zients, acting

director of the Office of Management and Budget, Brown and Portman joined 23 senators in calling his attention to language in

the recently-passed Highway Bill containing a statement by Congress calling for full use of the trust fund.

“Ohio’s ports and harbors are critical for our state’s economic health,” Brown said. “By utilizing the Harbor Maintenance Trust

Fund resources, we can make costly repairs that support Ohio industry and can attract new private investments to our state. We

must act now.”

“For far too long, Washington has skimmed off Harbor Maintenance Tax funds for purposes unrelated to ports or harbors. These

funds are intended for the dredging and maintenance of our ports and harbors, which support millions of jobs across Ohio and our

country,” said Portman. “With the economy still lagging behind, it is more important than ever to ensure robust commerce at our

nation’s ports and harbors to grow the economy and create jobs.”

Brown is also the original cosponsor of the *Harbor Maintenance Act of 2011*, a bipartisan bill that would help fund and maintain

the nation’s harbors, including harbors in Ashtabula, Cleveland, Conneaut, and Toledo.

In Feb. 2012, Brown’s staff participated in a meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Great Lakes Small Harbors

Coalition, and other stakeholders to discuss a new report on the state of our navigational infrastructure and funding for dredging

and harbor maintenance. The Army Corps report found that recent low water levels have accelerated deterioration in many harbor

structures at a time when federal resources are more difficult to acquire.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Brown has fought to fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

(GLRI). The GLRI is an interagency effort to target the most significant problems in the region and jumpstart restoration efforts to

protect, maintain, and restore the chemical, biological, and physical integrity of the Great Lakes. GLRI funding has helped

support the removal of invasive species and plants in Ohio, funded the Toledo Harbor Sediment Management Plan, and provided

resources for a comprehensive monitoring program to assess the nearshore Lake Erie water quality.

Full text of the letter is below.

*Mr. Jeffrey D. Zients*

*Acting Director*

*Office of Management and Budget*

Sens. Brown, Portman Call on Obama Administration to Tap Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund

*725 17 Street, NW*

*Washington, DC 20503*

*Dear Acting Director Zients:*

*As you develop the budget for fiscal year 2014 (FY2014), we want to call your attention to important provisions in the*

*surface transportation reauthorization act (Public Law 112-141) concerning harbor maintenance.*

*Among other things, Section 1536 of the law lays out a clear statement of Congress that “the Administration should request full*

*use of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for operating and maintaining the navigation channels of the United States.” At the*

*beginning of FY2014, the balance of the trust fund is estimated to total $8,098,000,000. In stark contrast, over the past few years,*

*the budget requests for operations and maintenance of harbors and ports for which this trust fund is intended to be used has*

*averaged around $800 million. Clearly, the revenues that are collected into the trust fund are not being used for their intended*

*purposes.*

*Ports and harbors are a critical component of our nation’s transportation infrastructure, and regular maintenance is required to*

*ensure their efficient use. Yet, the nearly 1,000 federal ports and harbors have not been adequately maintained by the Army*

*Corps of Engineers due to insufficient budget requests and appropriations. The Army Corps of Engineers has estimated that the*

*so-called top-priority harbors, those that handle about 90 percent of the commercial traffic, are dredged to their authorized depths*

*and widths only 35 percent of the time. Inadequate funding has resulted in channels getting narrower and shallower due to*

*inadequate dredging, which has resulted in ships having to light-load, increasing the cost of shipping, the risk of vessel*

*groundings, collisions, and pollution incidents. This situation is totally unacceptable.*

*We urge you to include in the budget sufficient funds for operations and maintenance of federal harbors and ports*

*equivalent to the estimated revenues collected into the fund for FY2014. With 13 million jobs and $4 trillion in economic activity*

*dependent on these ports and harbors, we cannot let them fall into further disrepair. Because waterborne transportation is often*

*the least expensive means of transporting vital commodities and goods, maintaining this essential infrastructure bolsters our*

*economic competitiveness and strengthens the economy.*

*We recognize the fiscal challenges our nation is facing. However, during these times of economic challenge, we can no longer*

*afford to ignore the will of Congress and flout the purpose for which these funds are collected. These waterways are simply too*

*important to our nation’s commerce and international competitiveness for this situation to continue. Thank you for your attention*

*to our request, and we look forward to working with you to strengthen our nation’s infrastructure and economy.*