

## **Recognizing our Port Cities At a Key Moment for Our Economy – and our Country**

*By Wendy Zatylny*

With the imminent renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the passing of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), just months ago, the importance of our import and export markets has once again come to the fore. There is arguably no more essential front line perspective on these relationships than our port authorities. Today, as Western Hemisphere Ports Day activities occur across Canada and throughout the Hemisphere, the opportunity to recognize our port cities and our marine economy has never seemed so timely.

The many reasons why may come as a surprise for most Canadians. First and foremost, about 90 per cent of everything we purchase has spent some time on a boat, making its way along a maritime route. And our ports are more than just the key connection points on rapidly developing transport corridors, they shape and define the economic development and diversity of their cities and their larger regions. They create good jobs and the stable foundations of a thriving middle class.

The numbers are impressive but let's face it - talking about economic statistics can be boring. Instead, let's take a look how great cities are magnets for creative and intellectual capital. As urban thinkers like Richard Florida have noted, the attractiveness and livability of cities depend upon their cultural and economic diversity; a dynamic downtown core has more than coffee shops and retail stores. There can be a clean tech start-up next door to a recording studio next door to a green grocer's. And each of these individual success stories is part of a thriving marine port economy with a forward thinking global perspective.

Indeed, from coast to coast to coast, our port communities of all sizes continue to rank as some of the best places in the world to work and live – and it is not merely a question of size or location on more established global supply chains. Our Ports present a focal point where innovation, creativity and cultural dynamism have rippled outwards as the city's boundaries have moved, both literally and figuratively, beyond their old limits.

This development can be attributed to the kind of work opportunities ports create – those knowledge-intensive and technologically sophisticated jobs that come with high salaries – yet there's more to it than that. Ports are, quite simply, good neighbours. As gateways for cargo and wealth, they connect communities in a way that is sustainable and environmentally friendly. They support local charities and foundations, rehabilitate environmentally sensitive shorelines, create public use recreational areas and build wharves where people can fish. Their port authorities are key partners in the development of green spaces that preserve and protect waterfront ecosystems, and by

supporting a broad range of cultural events and community activities that foster the growth of true civic capital as well.

And now, as our government focuses on an innovation agenda that can drive growth and development for decades to come, they need look no further than to the way our port cities are already positioning themselves as key players in the global economy. From the base of blue and white collar support jobs in customs brokering and inspecting, warehousing and freight forwarding, legal and accounting services, ship chandlery and repairs, our port authorities are evolving as repositories for the best international practices in logistics management. They have the potential to become one of the more strategically valuable sources of exportable intellectual capital in the years ahead.

Given all these factors in a rapidly evolving global economy, where our supply chains are integral to growth, our port cities are quite simply where all the action is. All three levels of government have an opportunity to seize the strategic advantages our port authorities can provide, with their thought leadership in innovation and trade, so these cities can continue to thrive - now more than ever.

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