

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**

**U.S. Senate Floor Remarks On the Nomination of Max Vekich to be  
Commissioner on the Federal Maritime Commission**

**February 9, 2022**

**CANTWELL:** “Madam President, I come to the floor to talk about a couple of items this morning. One is the nomination of Max Vekich, to the commissioner of the Federal Maritime Commission, and also to talk about the very important issue of our colleagues working together on America's innovation investment for the future.

“But let me just say first, about the nomination of Max Vekick, to be a commissioner of the Federal Maritime Commission.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented congestion at our ports and supply chain disruptions and businesses and Americans are feeling the pinch of the rising prices and shortages every day on these products.

“The news is that our colleagues can do something about that this morning, they can do something about that this morning.

“At a time when our country is in need of a strong Federal Maritime Commission, it’s important that they do their oversight role, that they investigate, that they regulate unfair practices by foreign shipping companies, and they make sure that US shippers, our growers and manufacturers get a fair deal.

“The Federal Maritime Commission’s role is particularly important when it comes to ensuring that American products get access to markets around the globe.

“While I don't agree with the conclusion of the Minority Leader on our investment in helping Americans during the pandemic, I know this, that right now, the Federal Maritime Commission should be investigating international shippers who are overcharging us exporters.

“Farmers have been hard hit by congestion and shipping challenges U.S. agriculture exports have experienced a 22% decrease in exports.

“Agriculture accounts for about one-tenth of American good exports, and roughly 20% of what U.S. farmers and ranchers produce is sent abroad and that's why they deserve a fair deal on shipping prices.

“Many of these products moved by containerized freight and containerized freight cost has more than doubled since the pandemic. Washington hay producers estimate that the freight costs could be three times more expensive by this winter.

“In addition, freight costs, ships are returned to Asia without with empty containers and standing, straggling on U.S. ports and docks. This is an unprecedented nature of shipping and has had a major impact on American exporters.

“And it's important that we understand that we need to do something about it.

“The National Milk Producers Federation estimates that shipping disruption cost the U.S. dairy industry nearly \$1 billion in the first half of 2021.

“Apples are Washington's most valuable agricultural commodity with \$2.1 billion in sales in 2020. And about 30% of the state's product is exported. According to the Washington State Apple commission port congestion has producers concentrating this year more on North American markets as opposed to overseas markets that are cutting in to their profits.

“So for every \$1 million boxes of fresh apples shifted into the US domestic market, the price drops about 50 cents per box as supply begins to overtake demand.

“These losses impact real American jobs and the American economy.

“But let's look at the other side of the equation. As Washington growers and American growers and American manufacturers struggle, foreign shipping companies are reporting more than \$200 billion in profit, more than double the profit that they made over the last 20 years combined.

“That's what these international shippers are profiting so it doesn't have anything to do with the fact that we helped Americans get a paycheck during pandemic, it has to do with foreign companies who were overcharging US producers of goods.

“At this critical time in our country. We need a federal Maritime Commission to move decisively to put in place practices and regulations to address port congestion and support US exporters and help them not be the target of unfair practices such as exorbitant shipping costs and the lack of access to ships.

“We need a commission that will take action and improve the information flow at ports and investigate these illegal practices and take enforcement action against foreign bad actors who are overcharging US exporters and other shippers.

“We need a commission who will stand up to foreign shipping interests and protect American manufacturers, farmers and other exporters.

“So yes, Madam Chair, there is something we can do, Madam President, about our supply chain woes. Particularly for states who have big export economies.

“That is why American shippers, American shippers and producers, American shippers, meaning the people who are actually shipping product, that's why American shippers and producers are behind the nomination of Max Vekich.

“Because Mr. Vekich knows the port's he knows the shipping community and has spent more than 40 years working on the waterfront.

“He's spent his life working in the maritime industry and knows the challenges that we face in maritime, in intermodal transportation in congestion and continuing to move forward on how we advance our ports.

“If you have worked on the dock for 40 years, I guarantee you, you know about every product and you know, what are the challenges that we face from this international competition.

“We are on the precipice of moving important, competitive legislation. But part of that competitive legislation is getting our products on vessels instead of being stranded at the docks and preventing shipping companies from retaliating against US exporters.

“Again, the majority of this product is moved by international shippers. It's an international business.

“So we need a commission in place that is willing to act, a commission that is willing to use their authority to enforce our current laws and to make sure we are protecting American exporters.

“That is why exporters like the Idaho Dairy Association supports Max Vekich because they know he knows how to move product. That is why the American Association of Port Authorities and trade associations representing more than 80 ports across the United States support Max Vekich, citing his unique leadership as a longtime maritime worker in the sector.

“The Pacific Northwest waterways Association represents ports, tug and barge companies, steamship operators, grain elevator operators, agricultural producers for his product manufacturers, electric utilities, irrigation districts, and businesses throughout Idaho, Oregon and Washington. This organization does not typically endorse candidates for these federal offices. But today they are calling for Mr. Veckich to be confirmed on the basis of quote, “his first hand knowledge of the maritime industry and its operations.”

“Mr. Veckich knows what it takes to move product from the heartland. He knows that in our Washington ports, we are helping US farmers get their products to market.

“So I know whether it's wheat, or soy beans, or other ag products, he knows what it takes to move them and what it takes for us to continue to improve the efficiency of our ports.

Whether it is the Midwest manufacturing products, like cars and jeeps, he knows what that takes and what it takes to continue to grow and skill a workforce that will help us do that cost effectively.

“He knows how to work with industry like agricultural producers and the waterfront workforce alike.

“So at a time when we're asking our dock workers, our longshoremen to work around the clock to help elevate and our efficiencies and improve port congestion. And I might say, Madam Chair, at the loss of life, the amount of deaths in the Longshoremen community would break your heart that they continue to work during the COVID crisis and literally lost their lives. And this is what these people are doing. They're helping us keep our supply chain going.

So at least we could do is invest in somebody who was going to help us understand what it takes to do that on a day to day basis.

We need to make sure that we have a competitive and fair environment for US companies.

So I asked my colleagues to confirm Max Vekich as Commissioner of the Federal Maritime Commission this morning.

Madam Chair, I'd also, I'll enter into the record a list of supporters as I mentioned:

American Association of Port Authorities  
Idaho Dairy Association  
Darigold  
Northwest Dairy Association  
Pacific Northwest Waterways Association  
International Longshore Association  
Tote Maritime  
Saltchuk  
Foss Maritime  
Pasha  
Matson  
SSA Marine  
Carnival  
Transportation Institute  
National Pilots Association  
American Maritime Congress  
ILWU  
Inland Boatman's Union  
Marine Engineers Beneficial Association  
National Farmers Union  
Masters Mates and Pilots  
American Radio Association

Seafarers

TTD

AFL-CIO

Local Washington state teamsters.

Local chapters of the Farm Union

Northwest Seaport Alliance

Port of Tacoma

Port of Seattle