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Leaders oppose port deal
South Carolina sites not part of plan

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 [Graphic: Seaport safety at issue in deal](#)

The White House's support for a proposed deal to turn over management operations at six of America's biggest ports to an Arab state-run firm was roundly condemned Wednesday by some of President Bush's staunchest South Carolina allies even though this state's ports aren't involved.

U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint, a Greenville Republican, told The Greenville News he would withhold support pending more information from a White House that did "a poor job of communicating" with lawmakers.

"The first impression is bad," DeMint said.

Under the deal, management operations at ports in New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and Philadelphia would be turned over to a state-owned company in the United Arab Emirates.

Advertisement President Bush is defending the arrangement and has threatened to cast his first veto if Congress attempts to block it.

Republican U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham of Seneca said the arrangement should be "closely scrutinized" because "on its face, the security outsourcing proposal does not strike me as being sound policy at this point in our nation's history."

Graham said that although the UAE has been a helpful ally in the war on terror, it is in the nation's interest to ensure it has strong control and oversight of its ports.

Republican Gov. Mark Sanford of Sullivans Island, who represented Charleston in the U.S. House for six years, opposes the plan, said spokesman Joel Sawyer.

"No public-private partnership should ever surrender or outsource security at our ports to a foreign entity," Sawyer said of Sanford's position.

David Posek, a State Ports Authority member from Greenville, said, "No," he wouldn't sleep well if Charleston's facilities were under a similar arrangement. "Looking at it as a U.S. citizen, it amazes me," he said.

"If I had to vote right now, I would vote to reverse approval," said U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, a Greenville Republican, who added a willingness to give the Bush administration time to explain itself and to rebut lawmakers' concerns.

"I think it merits another look. We need to be very careful about who is controlling operations at the ports," particularly involving an arm of a Middle Eastern government, Inglis said.

An irate former Democratic Sen. Ernest F. Hollings of Charleston said it was business as usual by the Bush administration, which he alleged hasn't adequately followed through on rail and airport security and now the ports.

Democratic Rep. John M. Spratt Jr. of York said Bush was blindsided by public reaction to a deal that raises multiple concerns.

"First, we have to be concerned about the United Arab Emirates controlling access to our major ports," he said. "After all, two of the hijackers on 9/11 came from Dubai. Second, we have to be worried about the vulnerability of our seaports and the dangers lurking in millions of containers, in which nuclear weapons could be secreted."

Republican U.S. Rep. Gresham Barrett of Westminster couldn't be reached for comment, but Darryl Broome, his district director, said that to say his boss is concerned would be an understatement.

Barrett wants at least a 45-day delay to give Congress time to assess the deal, Broome said.

Republican Rep. Henry Brown of Charleston, co-chairman of the Congressional Port Security Caucus, warned of a national security threat and lamented that Congress wasn't given a chance to review the arrangement.

DeMint said he would continue to be dubious, but added that Bush had "made a good case that the United Arab Emirates has been very helpful, up-front and open on the war on terror and we can't have an attitude that just because you're Arab, we can't blacklist you from business ventures, particularly if you've proven to be an ally in the war on terror."

Bobby Hitt, spokesman for BMW Manufacturing Co., one of the Charleston port's major customers, said while not commenting directly on the White House plan that it matters to his firm who operates a port and how stable it is.

A strong point in the Port of Charleston's favor, he said, is that it is a state-operated facility.

"They're stable. They're efficient, and they don't change owners," he said. "It has great stability because it is a state entity. We do business all over the world. We do business with Dubai (in the UAE)," he said. "Charleston is the most efficient port we deal with."

Hollings, for whom the Charleston port was a favorite project during his decades in the Senate, cited strong reservations about a Dubai-owned company running security.

"Yes, Dubai has made a couple of arrests (of terror suspects) and they say they are helping us and are an ally, but on the other hand of the ledger... Dubai does not recognize Israel," Hollings said.

"Secondly, it's the home of two of the fellows that went into the World Trade towers, and three, a lot of the financing of al Qaida has gone through the United Arab Emirates."

Hollings predicted that Bush would drop his adamant support for the contract.

"You can't defend Dubai. You can't defend Saudi Arabia. We still get our oil there. This Texas crowd does business with all that group. Come on. It's bad, bad port security.

"Osama bin Laden owns 10 oil tankers. He's got an interest in 10 more. It was his vessel that went into the port of Mombassa in Kenya and offloaded and blew up Nairobi and then went down to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, where (South Carolina's) Bob Royall was the ambassador. They blew it up before Bob got there," he said.

"It was Osama's boat. That fellow that blew it up, engineered the (USS) Cole, he came out of the United Arab

Emirates."

Republican U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson of Lexington and Democratic Rep. Jim Clyburn are on a congressional trip to Africa and couldn't be reached for comment.

Tim Smith of the Capital Bureau contributed to this report.
