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**U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's Gulf Regional Meeting
Port of New Orleans
New Orleans, Louisiana
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of our Port Director, Mr. LaGrange, who could not be here this morning (he's in Baton Rouge working on some legislation for the upcoming legislative session here), and on behalf of our Board, we would like to welcome the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to our city and to our port. I would also like to welcome the many distinguished visitors and guests who will be making presentations to you during the next two days. It looks like you have a very busy agenda that will be very productive for the Commission.

You will hear from many expert speakers, but perhaps the most important message you will hear from Louisianans is that we are losing our land mass at an alarming rate. Your meeting is very important and timely to us in Louisiana because of the attention that will be focused on the issues of coastal erosion and the monumental job facing us in turning back the loss of land. I'm sure Mr. Bahr and Mr. Caldwell will have many more comments this afternoon.

The Port of New Orleans is very concerned about these issues and the potential solutions. A massive effort is needed to stop land loss and to rebuild our coastal areas in a manner which is sensitive to habitat for fish and wildlife and which also recognizes the importance of the maritime industry.

The economic health and future of the Port of New Orleans is our primary concern. This building is located 95 miles from Head of Passes and another 25 miles to the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico. It is a long journey for a vessel – 10 hours to come up the Mississippi River.

Nevertheless, the lower Mississippi River region is arguably the largest port complex in the world in terms of tonnage. This city has been the center of maritime commerce since its founding by Jean Baptist Le Moyne, known as Bienville in 1718. Recent years' statistics show that a total of 428 million tons of foreign waterborne and domestic commerce moved through the consolidated deepwater ports of Louisiana situated on the lower Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and the Gulf of Mexico.

Ninety-one percent of America's foreign merchandise trade by volume moves in ships. Twenty-one percent of the nation's foreign waterborne commerce passes through Louisiana ports. More than 230,000 barges pass through the Port of

New Orleans annually. In 1999, 2,345 ocean-going vessels operated by more than 80 steamship lines serving U.S. trade with more than 150 countries called the Port of New Orleans.

The foreign markets served by of Louisiana's lower Mississippi River ports are worldwide. However, the primary domestic markets are mid-American states. The Heartland region currently produces 60 percent of the nation's agricultural products; one-half of all the manufactured goods; and 90 percent of the machinery and transportation equipment.

Bulk cargo primarily consisting of grain, animal feed exports, and petroleum imports made up 82 percent of the volume. Fifty-three million tons of grain from 17 states was exported. This represents about 55 percent of the total U.S. grain exports accessing world markets. There are some ten grain elevators on the lower Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and the Gulf of Mexico. This same port complex receives 87 million tons of petroleum products representing 15 percent of the U.S. waterborne imports of petroleum products. The general cargo facilities here at the Port of New Orleans last year in 2001 handled 8.8 million tons in cargo and commodities such as steel, rubber, coffee, forest products, copper, aluminum, and many consumer goods.

I will conclude my remarks by simply once again welcoming you here to our port. If there's anything that you need while you are here or anything that we can do for you, please let us know. It looks like the weather is going to be beautiful. Hopefully you will have a chance to walk out on the plaza and enjoy the great Mississippi River. If there's anything else we can possibly do for you while you are here, please don't hesitate to ask.

Thank you very much.