February 28, 2024

Investing in America: Clean Air, Clean Ports, Healthier Communities

Mayor Bill Saffo: Well, good morning, everyone, it’s always a great day to be in the city of Wilmington, as my predecessor used to always tell me, it’s been broader on behalf of the city of Wilmington welcome to our historic and vibrant port city. Since our city’s founding Wilmington has played a vital role in shipping and commerce. Our strategic location at the mouth of the Cape Fear River makes Wilmington one of the points of connection between the region, our state our nation and the rest of the world that is central to our identity as a community it is also a responsibility that we take seriously. The city of Wilmington values its partnership with the Port of Wilmington the Port Authority and the state of North Carolina and our federal stakeholders as well as private industry that calls Wilmington home together our collective works help to maintain the global supply chain and fuel the economic engine of city region state and nation. The importance the growth and the vision for the port of Wilmington’s future all reflect our shared commitment to high quality infrastructure and economic progress. In Wilmington we also place high value on our role as stewards of our environment and natural resources. Our commitment to future generations is not only a strong and vibrant economy but also one that respects and cares for the quality of our air, water and land. As I welcome our Administrator Regan here, I want to extend our thanks for your work and the attention of your agency and the administration on the past issue. We look forward to our continued partnership on that issue. Governor Cooper we are always excited to welcome you to Wilmington because so often your trips are bringing us good news, news of new jobs and new investments. If you want to tell the story of how North Carolina became the greatest place in America for business and to live, work and raise a family, look no further than Wilmington, North Carolina. We look forward to our continued partnership with you governor and especially we work to make our infrastructure stronger and more resilient. On behalf of the city council and the entire Wilmington community, welcome and thank you for making our city the site of today’s great announcement. Thank you.

Susan Raven: Okay, good morning, thank you Mayor Sappo, welcome to the port the North Carolina state ports authority, Port of Wilmington. Administrator Regan, Governor Cooper, Representative Butler, Secretary Biser, Mayor Sappo, we also have a DOT board member Landon Zimmer, here representing DOT today and we have some community I mean county commissioners from new Hanover County. I believe Robs Apple’s here and as well I’m Susan Raven and I’m Chair of the North Carolina State Courts Authority. We also have two fellow board members here today and I hope I haven’t missed anybody else Greg Washington and Michael Johnson. We appreciate everybody’s attendance here today in joining us. The authority is an enterprise agency of the state of North Carolina with a clear mission to enhance the economy of the entire state. Our facility as well as our deep-water port in Morehead city and our Charlotte inland port combined to support more than 88,000 direct and indirect jobs. The work of the authority contributes more than $660 million dollars annually in local and state tax revenue. Businesses need access to the global market where their products are sold and where their resources are found. The work the authority provides that access making North Carolina ports a key factor in our state’s phenomenal economic growth, and we are just getting started. Our multimillion capital expansion efforts are paying off in new businesses not just at our dots but in new Hanover County and beyond and with new facilities and distribution centers. While we are still focused on growing our businesses, we are committed in doing so in an environmentally conscious manner that preserves this area we are fortunate to call home. We are proud of our mission and our impact on our state’s economy, and we are grateful for support of the state and especially Governor Cooper. Governor Cooper is no stranger to the Port of Wilmington. In fact, he can tell you a story of taking a turn operating some of our heavy equipment here. So, under his leadership North Carolina is focused on a clean energy future that creates jobs and protects our environment. Governor the Authority is grateful for your support and leadership. Ladies and gentlemen please join me in welcoming Governor Roy Cooper.

Governor Roy Cooper: Well, thank you madam chair, Susan Raven is going to lead the North Carolina port authority with excellence and distinction and Susan this time it didn’t have anything about me operating equipment on the schedule. I don’t know why that’s the case. You know we might not be able to kick a field goal into this win, but I think the group we have gathered today can meet most any other challenge. I’m glad to be with you here Mayor Sappo and other Wilmington leaders. Representative Butler I’m glad you’re here. Our Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality Elizabeth Biser here. Our secretary of transportation was going to be here, but he had an issue of trying to get here but sends his support. I just realized how funny that was uh thank you for that Representative Butler. I’m sure the secretary would be very happy that you said that, but I am proud to be here at the Port of Wilmington to celebrate both of our state ports and talk about how we can make them even better. Americans learned about the importance of supply chain when all around the world the shipments of goods were crippled as the world emerged from the pandemic, facing labor shortages and things we had taken for granted before often went on the shelves because of it. In North Carolina we attacked this head on as did the Biden Administration in Washington and now we are back on track and our ports had a lot to do with that. North Carolina ports had a record last year moving goods in and out of our states and I’ll tell you folks the investments the Biden Administration has made are generational. We’ve been waiting for them for decades and now they are finally here the federal investments we are getting for roads and bridges and airports and rail and public transportation and high-speed internet and clean water system and clean energy jobs and of course our ports will improve our state for decades and generations to come. In North Carolina we are already the number one state for business and it’s because of our strong diverse well trained dedicated workforce but these investments that we are making can help us stay that way along with important investments in our public schools and important investments in education. We’ve become a clean energy epicenter in North Carolina and that’s bringing us thousands and thousands of good paying jobs into our state, that’s a good thing. Today’s announcement will help build on what we’re already doing in North Carolina. Getting to carbon zero emissions, fighting climate change and pollution and creating clean energy jobs that are putting money in the pockets of North Carolina families and going where the private markets are already going making sure that North Carolina is riding that wave. This investment that will be announced today means a cleaner work environment for the men and women who have jobs here now and imports all over the United States. It will also help the communities around the ports cleaner. It will help us further our goals of environmental justice which I know our guest has been a champion of and it will make our state more efficient and effective and make sure courts are doing the things that they need to do to keep our economy strong. We have with us today the Administrator of the EPA. He was formerly secretary Biser’s job as Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality. Already he has taken the lead across this country in helping to reduce pollution while energizing our economy and I’m proud to introduce to you my friend and the Administrator of EPA, Michael Regan, Michael…

Administrator Regan: Well good morning, I want to say thank you to Governor Cooper not only for his leadership here in North Carolina but on the national level. I’m a little bit jealous that there are very few times that I brief the President of the United States and he doesn’t end with please tell your governor he’s doing one hell of a job….so Governor Cooper thank you for that leadership and your partnership. Mayor Saffo it’s always good to be with you and thank you for reminding me that we have to walk and chew gum at the same time while we make these announcements like the ones we are making today. We have not forgotten about eliminating pollution like pfas in our drinking water. To chair raven and the port of Wilmington thank you for hosting us here today. We are so grateful to be here with you all and I want to say thank you to all the state and local appointed leaders, many of you are my friends and my colleagues so I appreciate you all being here, and I appreciate and the fact that you lead where the rubber meets the road so thank you all for being on that front line. For me it’s great to be back in North Carolina. I’ve traveled to over 35 states and 13 countries since I’ve been administrator and no matter where I go in the world there’s absolutely no place like the old north state. On day one of this administration President Biden and Vice President Harris put forth a very clear vision to invest in America to ensure the strength and vitality of our nation’s economy and to protect and empower communities that have been historically left behind and since the very start I’m proud to say that EPA has delivered on that mission. Ports like this one here in Wilmington are essential for commerce and are vital to our nation’s economic growth and supply chain infrastructure but at the same time many communities residing near and around our nation’s ports are exposed to unhealthy air so today we’re proving yet once again that we can walk and chew gum at the same time. We’re proving that environmental protection and economic prosperity go hand in hand and that is why I’m excited to announce that EPA is launching our 3-billion-dollar Clean Ports Program yes, I’d like to say billion with a because sometimes people don’t realize how much money we are investing. We’ll fund zero emissions port equipment and infrastructure upgrades while supporting both climate and air pollution reduction strategies at all our us ports and we know that the port here will be leading on that national front. This program will lay the groundwork for transformational change by encouraging a transition to zero emissions operations and reducing diesel pollution in and around our port communities. To do this we are releasing two notice of funding opportunities. The first will make $2.8 billion investment to facilitate the transition to zero emission equipment and infrastructure while reducing mobile sources emissions and delivering clean air for communities all around our country. The second funding opportunity will make close to $150 million available for climate and air quality planning activities at ports to help build capacity for the ongoing transition to zero emission port operations. Simply put, EPA’s Clean Ports Program is an absolute game changer. These historic investments will help protect the health of port communities as well as the workforce that relies on ports for the livelihood and our nation’s global competitiveness and through the manufacturing, installation and maintenance of zero emissions equipment and infrastructure EPA’s Clean Ports Program will create new jobs in the domestic clean energy sector positioning our nation as a global leader in critical clean energy technologies and today’s announcement in more than just an investment in our economy it’s an investment in President Biden’s pledge and commitment to environmental justice. Thanks to the President’s investment in America. We are ensuring that those who live near ports can finally breath cleaner healthier air. We are reimagining clean technology and revolutionizing our nation’s port infrastructure while addressing climate and environmental justice concerns. We are creating thousands of good paying jobs in our clean energy sector and together we all are building a healthier brighter future a future where all people can have clean air to breathe clean water to drink and a safe place to live, work and pray. So again, thank you all for being here and just know we’re not stopping until we get the job done. Thank you so much.

Unidentified person: Well, it looks like a good forecast to me as we compete for this unprecedented amount of federal money. Invest in these already effective ports of North Carolina that will reduce pollution for the men and women who work here. For surrounding communities, it will make us more efficient and effective, and it’ll help us do the job better so it’s exciting that this announcement was made in North Carolina. It’s great to have the administrator who was born here and loves this state so much he sees a lot of potential here because he’s seen it firsthand. Well, you know we want to get these resources out as quickly as possible whenever we make national announcements, we make it from a place we have strong leadership both at the state and local level but also, it’s evident here at this port that there is strong leadership and management and great care in the type of workforce that is being developed here. I am also proud to say that Mayor Saffo cares so deeply about the workers here at the port but also the community of Wilmington so we look for that magic recipe that we know will put forth very creative grant applications. I feel very strongly that number one $3 billion is a lot of money so there is enough to go around but number two we’re going to see strong applications from all across the country and there’s no better place to make an announcement like this than from the State of North Carolina you’ve got a very strong governor here number one in business a great opportunity to connect technology with the workers and the people it’s just a great place to make an announcement.

Unidentified person: Well, this is a tremendous announcement the city of Wilmington the last couple of years has put an initiative forward to reduce greenhouse gases by 100% of the year 2050 and this is a strong commitment by the City of Wilmington the city council and it’s something we take very seriously. This is a tremendous announcement it ties right into our entire reduction of greenhouse emissions. We know that the environment is very important to this community and this state to this Administrator and to this Governor and we just want to continue to work in that behalf collectively between the state between the national leaders and between the local leaders and making this a reality and it’s something that’s not happening just here in Wilmington it’s happening all over the country where cities all over the country are taking these initiatives very seriously and very importantly it’s our environment, the future of our country, it’s the future of our world, the future of this planet. I congratulate the Administrator and the Administration for making this strong commitment to our community and look forward to doing whatever I have to make that a reality and helping them make it a reality. Thank you.

Administrator Regan: Listen I would say that President Biden’s vision and leadership has been relentless from day one when he took over the White House, he pledged to work for all Americans to put this country back on track. So, I am very proud that he has worked across the aisle in a bipartisan fashion to take a very strong look at how we protect public health, how we strengthen our economy, but he has always had a laser focus on being globally competitive and there’s a national security component to this so there’s a win win win aspect to this. It’s been quite a long road to get congress to move to get the money to EPA and now our goal is to get this money out the door as expeditiously as possible.

Inaudible Question: I think that these ports are in a competitive position to reduce pollution from all sources from mobile sources and from any sources that have an impact on the workers here and on their neighboring communities. We’ve designed these competitions or these grants in a way that we don’t want to be paternalistic. Most of the best solutions come from communities on the ground so we look forward to what the competition will yield in terms of the applications here and we’re just excited about the potential there.

Unidentified person: Thanks man it is going to be great.