

# Port commissioners: Here's your chance

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An amazing opportunity has dropped into the Port of Seattle commissioners' laps and, if they take advantage of it, it could help set the agency on an improved course in 2013 and beyond: It's a chance to fill a rare vacancy on the commission.

The remaining four commissioners should move swiftly and thoughtfully to fill the vacancy created by fellow Commissioner [Gael Tarleton](#)'s election to the state Legislature in November. They should choose a person with the wisdom, expertise and vision to help steer the organization now and in the future.

Why not appoint someone with an engineering background? After all, much of what the port does is build infrastructure. Or how about a person with experience in logistics management, someone who knows what it takes to move freight and people efficiently? Perhaps a labor leader who understands business?

The opportunity to choose an exceptionally qualified person to serve on the commission is golden.

The commission has — and has had — many good, dedicated members. But too many port commissioners have viewed the job as something of an internship — a place to get their political chops and then take shots at higher office. We've had port commissioners run for mayor, city council, county executive, county council, county assessor and the state Legislature.

How about an appointee who is at the pinnacle of his or her career, someone who has a breadth of experience and provided leadership to a successful organization? Someone who wants to give back to the community?

The port needs all the expert help it can get right now. The ports of Seattle and Tacoma face serious competition that threatens tens of thousands of jobs across the state, thousands of private businesses and billions of dollars of public investment.

The threats are real and now:

— Port Metro Vancouver (British Columbia) is polishing up plans for a \$2 billion container terminal expansion, on top of a \$2.8 billion investment to improve truck-and-rail access to the port terminals.

— Farther north, the Port of Prince Rupert — which has already captured 500,000-plus containers a year from U.S. West Coast ports — plans to expand capacity to handle more than two million containers a year.

— The giant Port of Los Angeles is investing \$1.2 billion over the next five years to modernize its container-handling facilities.

— In less than two years, the \$6 billion project to expand the Panama Canal will be complete, providing direct access for huge container-carrying ships to Gulf Coast and East Coast ports.

Other factors are also working against Seattle and Tacoma, including the fact that ships are getting much larger and will be calling at fewer ports in the future.

One thing is for sure: The port landscape — between Panama and Prince Rupert — is going to be a lot different in 10 years than it is today. Like it or not, there will be winners and losers.

The good news is the Port of Seattle has a plan it calls the “Century Agenda,” which is focused and sets the right goals. Now the task at hand is coming up with an action plan that can achieve those goals, something the fresh eyes of a well-qualified new port commissioner could help with.

It’s been 12 years since there was a vacancy on the Port of Seattle Commission to fill by appointment. Let’s hope the commissioners take advantage of this opportunity and select an exceptional person who can help guide the port, and get 2013 off to a great start!

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