

**Statement of
Max M. Vekich
Nominee to Serve as Commissioner
Federal Maritime Commission
Before the
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
October 20, 2021**

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, and members of the committee, good morning.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and testify in support of my nomination to serve as a Commissioner on the Federal Maritime Commission. I am honored to be considered for this position and humbled by the President's trust in me.

I am pleased to be joined by my wife, Marcee Stone-Vekich.

The values of public service were instilled in me at an early age. My father and uncles all fought in World War II. Their experiences showed me the need for individuals to contribute in ways that benefit the many. Throughout my life, I have sought ways to try and follow the example of rendering service that was set by those who raised me.

I am grateful to President Biden for nominating me to this position and appreciate his confidence, that if confirmed, I can make a contribution to the work of the Commission.

To share a bit about me, I was raised in Aberdeen, WA, a small rural seaport, which on the West Coast has a reputation for being an industrious port. I inherited my father's love of ships and followed him to work on the docks, as a longshoreman. It was a gift to work with people who really knew how to work hard and work smart. I learned a lot from that experience and those old hands. Furthermore, this job allowed me to put myself through college, earning an associate's and bachelor's degrees. I am proud that my son and daughter have chosen to make their livings as longshore workers in the Northwest Seaport Alliance (Seattle-Tacoma).

I am excited by the prospect of serving on the Federal Maritime Commission. This is an opportunity that will allow me to combine my 49 years of experience working in the maritime industry, my eight years as a Legislator in the Washington State House of Representatives, and my 15 years of executive work serving on the board of an international labor organization. I am confident that these combined understandings provide me with a particularly unique set of skills to consider matters that come before the Commission.

An overwhelmed supply chain with its consequent congestion, such as we see now, is an existential challenge to the national economy. My experience tells me if a logistics problem is left unaddressed, it is likely to grow exponentially.

I understand international trade and the shipping industry. I have accumulated five decades of “hands on” experience working the waterfront, moving every sort of ocean cargo imaginable—imports and exports, containerized, and bulk. I understand the value shipping brings to communities through the jobs it creates, the families it supports, and the revenues it generates. I recognize the important contribution that ocean-linked supply chains play in not only supporting American manufacturing and bringing goods to consumers, but also in providing the United States with an economic competitive advantage. I am anxious to contribute to keeping the supply chain and ocean shipping a vibrant, reliable international goods movement system.

The FMC is a competition enforcement agency, rather than a utility regulator, but it plays an important role as an advocate for an efficient supply chain. I know that port congestion is on everyone’s mind. I applaud Chairman Maffei’s VOCC Audit Program to assess compliance with FMC rules on detention and demurrage. I also applaud the examination the Commission has undertaken to investigate surcharges of certain carriers making certain the fees were instituted properly. I am intrigued by Commissioner Rebecca Dye’s thoughts about commercial solutions to the supply chain congestion and hope, if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I will be able to complement her work on that issue. I am especially interested in Fact Finding 29. Container return and the availability of export containers would be other areas I believe I could contribute to making progress that would benefit users of the system. Sending empty containers across the Pacific has always concerned me. I know repositioning equipment is necessary, but the United States has so many excellent products to offer the world’s markets, we should find ways to do everything we can to support our exporters. I believe strongly in supporting exports and throughout my career, I have been lucky enough to be associated with many export cargoes. I have helped export Jeeps to China, soybean meal to the Philippines and Australia, corn to India, heavy equipment to Russia, wood products, potatoes, and seafood to the Pacific Rim to name just a few. If I am confirmed, I would support any Commission

initiative designed to facilitate exports or address issues that export shippers face that are within the Commission's jurisdiction. I want to do everything I can to support American exports and American jobs.

The FMC has a small, but key, role requiring cruise ships have the funds to reimburse consumers when appropriate. Passenger protection is always a good idea. I am glad to report that on October 8, 2021, I worked on The Norwegian *ENCORE*, an NCL cruise ship returning from Alaska. Safety protocols, some of the same ones advocated for by Commissioner Sola in Fact Finding 30, were followed. I am pleased that cruise ships are again calling communities in Alaska that were particularly hard-hit during the pandemic.

The FMC is comprised of five independent and co-equal members. Each Commissioner brings their own skills and specialties to their duties. If confirmed, I envision my role as being able to provide a firsthand perspective of what is really involved in moving ocean freight. I also understand the culture of the Commission is one of cooperation and cordiality and I have enjoyed similar dynamics in the Washington Legislature. Some of the best work I did would not have been possible without engagement and collaboration.

I am a Senior Supercargo normally working the night and hoot shifts in the deep-water ports of Washington state. On the waterfront we like to say, "we run to the work." That is how I will approach my work as a Commissioner. The FMC is frequently invoked in news stories reporting on supply chain problems and I am still learning about parameters of the Commission's authorities and jurisdiction. I am an enthusiastic learner and will embrace the challenge of getting up to speed on what the agency can do to provide relief and improve cargo fluidity.

Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Wicker, if given the privilege to serve on the Federal Maritime Commission, I promise to follow the statutory requirements of the law in an objective and unbiased manner. Furthermore, I pledge to you that I will be fully responsive and engaged with any demand or request of this committee as you perform your legislative and regulatory oversight of the FMC.