

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

October 7, 2024

President Joe Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

With Hurricane Milton bearing down on Florida's Gulf Coast, we request you direct federal agencies to expedite plans to respond to potential impediments or destruction of the Port of Tampa Bay and its associated federal channel. Long-term disruptions to the port would not only hinder disaster response and recovery, but have lasting consequences for Florida's economy.

As you may know, more than 40 percent of the volume of petroleum products consumed in Florida, including gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel, arrive through the Port of Tampa Bay, serving communities along the Gulf Coast and the I-4 Corridor.<sup>1</sup> The port is also a major thoroughfare for aggregates and other construction materials that would be necessary for recovery and rebuilding efforts post-Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Due to the port's location in Tampa Bay, the total length of the federal channels is approximately 70 miles, including portions that extend from the bay to beyond the barrier islands at the mouth of Tampa Bay. This reality makes the channel susceptible to sand shoaling in normal conditions, but in severe hurricane conditions the port and channel could be otherwise obstructed by sediment and other storm debris. The port's location could also result in some of the most severe storm surge from Hurricane Milton impacting onshore facilities, including petroleum infrastructure. Any extended disruptions to navigability of the federal channel or the operability of onshore petroleum infrastructure would have dire long-term consequences for the recovery of communities impacted by Helene and Milton as well as the Florida economy as a whole. Disruptions to the port would drive price increases and shortages of petroleum-based fuel products that could economically harm millions of Floridians.

To stave off long-term economic consequences that could be caused by impediments to navigation or the destruction of petroleum infrastructure at the Port of Tampa Bay, we urge you to expedite the finalization of plans to:

1. Ensure U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assets are in place to assess the federal channel for sediment shoaling and debris immediately following the storm;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.porttb.com/about-port-tampa-bay#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20more%20than%2043,export%20of%20citrus%20juice%20concentrate.>

2. If needed, prepare to mobilize the Army Corps of Engineers for emergency dredging and construction operations to remove sediment from the federal channel and assist port tenants in rehabilitating onshore petroleum infrastructure as quickly as possible using natural disaster response emergency authorities;<sup>2</sup> and
3. Utilize waivers, as appropriate, to facilitate interstate deliveries of petroleum fuel products via truck, rail, and maritime modes of transportation.

In the event that a worst case scenario occurs due to Hurricane Milton, preparation to accomplish these actions prior to landfall will aid in recovery.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>2</sup> <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?hl=false&edition=prelim&req=granuleid%3AUSC-2012-title33-section701n&num=0>