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**THE PORT OF BALTIMORE IS ON THE UPSWING AND A GOOD INDICATOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR OUR NATION**

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**By Senator Ben Cardin**

For those who believe the U.S. economy is in decline, I have one response for you: Come visit the Port of Baltimore. If you visit the Port, you will see first-hand that it is doing landmark business, a strong indication that our overall economy is on the upswing. Last year there was such a dramatic increase in the amount of imports and exports flowing through the Port that it saw the greatest increase of growth of any major port in the country.

We in Maryland are fortunate that the Port of Baltimore is so well positioned for the future. Earlier this year, construction was completed on a new 50-foot deep container berth at the Port's Seagirt Marine Terminal. In June, the Port welcomed four supersized container cranes that can load and unload cargo for some of the largest ships in the world, and, in 2015, the expansion of the Panama Canal will be completed allowing bigger ships from Asia to transit to East Coast ports. Baltimore will be only one of a few ports on the East Coast that will be able to handle these larger vessels.

Today, the Port of Baltimore is ranked number one among 360 U.S. ports for handling farm and construction machinery, autos, light trucks, imported forest products, imported sugar, imported iron ore and gypsum. It ranks second in the nation for exported coal, imported salt and imported aluminum.

The Port handles the largest export tonnage of autos and trucks in the nation, which is a reflection of the stronger U.S. auto market. In 2009, I was a strong supporter of President Obama's effort to save the domestic auto industry. Our investment of \$25 billion in loans is being repaid and the domestic auto industry is now back on its feet. The increased volume of cars and light trucks going

through the Port of Baltimore today is due in part to the decision we made to invest in the U.S. auto industry in early 2009.

All this trade translates into jobs -- jobs for Marylanders. Currently, the Port of Baltimore generates about 14,630 direct jobs and another 108,000 jobs are linked to Port activities. The Port is responsible for approximately \$3 billion in personal wages a year.

While our nation has gone through the most serious economic downturn since the Great Depression, the Port's booming business is strong evidence of the growing strength of our nation's manufacturing base and the resilience of our economy. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that 120,000 new factory jobs were created in 2011 and the United States continues to manufacture more than any other country in the world.

Another plus for the Port of Baltimore is the growing cruise industry. In 2011, more than 250,000 people sailed on more than 100 cruises out of Baltimore. Nearly all of these cruises sailed at 100 percent of capacity. All signs indicate that 2012 will be another record year for the cruise industry in Baltimore. The total economic value of the cruise industry to Maryland is about \$90 million, supporting approximately 200 direct jobs.

The Port of Baltimore is an economic engine for our state and a bell weather for our nation's economic health. A visit to the Port of Baltimore will convince most people that we are well on our way to an economic recovery.