

Increased pressure on ports following Panama Canal widening

Bruce Ramsey hit the nail on the head in his outline of the challenges facing Puget Sound ports that threaten tens of thousands of good-paying jobs here in the international freight-moving industry ["Puget Sound ports need to get ready for Panama Canal widening," Opinion, March 17].

Washington's ports not only generate a lot of jobs in the Puget Sound region, they also provide the state's huge agricultural sector with efficient access to world markets. But much more needs to be done to position Washington to be competitive in the future — especially creating improvements to our trade and transportation infrastructure.

The state can also help by keeping taxes and fees down. State government taxes and fees — especially as shippers climb out of the recession — will be an increasing factor. Taxes and fees no matter how small add up and create a competitive disadvantage for Puget Sound ports. For example, state-imposed expenses for the standby-rescue tug at Neah Bay and state-approved higher pilotage fees are raising operating costs for shippers using Puget Sound ports.

State officials can protect jobs — from longshoremen to farmers — by keeping taxes and fees down and by making needed highway and rail improvements.

— *Capt. Michael Moore, vice president, Pacific Merchant Shipping, Seattle*