

## Baltimore's top officials oppose sale of major port operator to United Arab Emirates based company.

Source: 

Publication Date: 24-FEB-06

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Baltimore County's two top elected officials have joined colleagues in Maryland and elsewhere in opposing the sale of a major port operator to a company based in the United Arab Emirates. County Executive James T. Smith Jr., citing security concerns for 3,000 county residents who work at the Port of Baltimore, has added his name to a list that includes Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., Baltimore City Mayor Martin O'Malley and members of the Congressional delegation. The issue, which involves the \$6.8 billion acquisition of U.K.-based Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Co. by Dubai Ports World, has cut across party lines. The governor even overruled his own maritime chief, Maryland Port Administration Executive Director F. Brooks Royster III, who initially didn't object to the move. "Despite the assurances of President Bush, we all know that the security of our ports is minimal," Smith, a Democrat, said in a prepared statement. "Some steps are easy to take and some questions are easy to answer. Whether or not foreign governments should be able to own any portion of port operations in the United States of America is one of those questions. And the answer is no!" "The ports are one of our most vulnerable points," said John Olszewski Sr., chairman of the Baltimore County Council and 28-year port worker. "I can't see recommending that kind of a move." Democratic Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger, a former two-term Baltimore County executive who currently represents the Port of Baltimore's district in the U.S. House of Representatives, has called for congressional hearings to re-evaluate the transaction. The U.S. Department of the Treasury has cleared the sale, which may involve turning over container loading and unloading operations at six major U.S. ports, including Baltimore, to a company controlled by the UAE government, which the Bush administration classifies as an ally in the war on terror. Olszewski is concerned that the UAE's pro-western posture might be subject to internal politics. "Who's to say they won't change in the future?" said Olszewski, a Democrat whose 7th District includes Dundalk, home to the Port of Baltimore. Olszewski, like Ruppertsberger, also said he's opposing a liquefied natural gas terminal and pipeline proposed for the former Sparrows Point Shipyard, also for security reasons. Virginia-based AES Corp. has been trying to build support for the project for several months. "That LNG plant would be a stone's throw from the Port of Baltimore," the councilman said. "I'm very concerned about the possibility of explosions in the area." If the project goes through Maryland would be the only state with two LNG importing stations. The existing operation is in Calvert County. ResearchThe University of Maryland, College Park said yesterday one of its port security research houses may have a product to improve the security of shipping containers ready in about a year. "Existing scanning technology lacks precision," Kenneth Gabriel, a director of the research centers, said in a prepared statement. "By blending a variety of sensing and communication technologies into a workable chain, we can provide real-time monitoring of shipments, detect tampering, intrusion or certain threats, then automatically send actionable information." The technology may be ready for a working demonstration in a year, Gabriel said. An inspection of "high risk" containers combined with monitoring technology is the best defense against possible smuggling of a weapon of mass destruction through a port, said William Lucyshyn, research chief of the university's Center for Public Policy and Private Enterprise. Hani S. Mahmassani, another university research director, sees the development of "real-time" technology as key. "The real-time component is what makes these various technologies so promising in providing greater freight security and efficiency," Mahmassani said in the release. "By offering economic as well as security advantages, they will be far more likely to be widely adopted."