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**PORT OFFICIALS RESPECT PEER PROCESS
BUT CONTINUE TO DISAGREE WITH FINDINGS**

GULFPORT, Miss. – While Port of Gulfport officials welcome and are accustomed to oversight, they continue to disagree with some aspects of the Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER) report released today.

“The report says we can’t create the number of jobs we are to produce in the time we have,” said Jonathan Daniels, Executive Director and CEO of the Mississippi State Port Authority. “We have taken a very aggressive approach to pursuing jobs and investment now and, based on the level of prospective tenant activity, we are confident that we can achieve our goals.”

Two prospective tenants have signed confidential memorandums of understanding with the Port and are in the process of exploring their potential location in Gulfport.

“Both MOUs were signed since the PEER completed their review,” noted Daniels. “So in some respects, this report is already outdated.”

Maritime industry experts also disagree with the report’s findings. A representative from R.K. Johns, a management consulting firm serving the maritime transportation industry that is familiar with the Port of Gulfport stated, “We found the PEER report assumptions and analyses to be inconsistent with maritime industry standards,” the firm said in a prepared statement.

Daniels acknowledged the PEER Committee was entirely accurate in one aspect, “It’s important to note the PEER Committee found no issues in regard to the financial management or stewardship in the restoration program at the Port of Gulfport,” Daniels said. “Our management of the restoration funds is under continuous review by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Throughout the ongoing restoration we have made a conscious effort to exercise total transparency.”

Unlike other state agencies, the MSPA has an audit performed annually. “More than a decade ago our Board of Commissioners recognized the need for fiscal responsibility and accountability,” said Daniels. “And for the last 20 years we have relied on an independent accounting firm to perform an annual audit.”