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ILWU tells employers: finish negotiations, don't close ports over only a few remaining issues

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – The ILWU is trying to keep dock employers at the negotiating table to finish an agreement that is “extremely close.”

“We’re this close,” said ILWU President Robert McEllrath, who held up two fingers in a gesture indicating how close the parties are to reaching an agreement.

“We’ve dropped almost all of our remaining issues to help get this settled - and the few issues that remain can be easily resolved.”

The ILWU pledged to keep the ports open and keep cargo flowing, despite the massive, employer-caused congestion crisis that has delayed shipping for most of 2014.

This is the second time in recent memory that the employers have threatened to close ports at the final stages of negotiations. The union has not engaged in a port strike over the coast longshore contract since 1971, 44 years ago.

“Closing the ports at this point would be reckless and irresponsible,” said McEllrath. The ILWU urged the Federal Mediator to keep both parties at the talks until the nearly-finished agreement is concluded.

If the PMA closes the ports, “the public will suffer and corporate greed will prevail,” said McEllrath, who noted that the major powers on the employer side are multi-national corporations who are foreign-owned. “These foreign-owned companies make billions of dollars and pay their executives millions to do their bidding.”

The ILWU Longshore Division represents 20,000 dockworkers at 29 west coast ports.

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