

BY BRUCE SMITH
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CHARLESTON — Deepening the Charleston Harbor shipping channel was placed on the national agenda Monday when President Barack Obama asked for \$3.5 million in his 2013 budget to continue work on a \$20 million study of the project.

The development was praised by Republicans and Democrats alike in a state where the proposed \$300 million deepening of the channel is a top priority. Officials say the channel needs to be 50 feet deeper to handle larger container ships that will call when the Panama Canal is deepened in 2014.

"This is critically important to our port, to Charleston, to this region, the state of South Carolina and really this part of our country," said Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. He met with the president in January of last year, with officials of the Office of Management and the Budget last summer, and again with Obama last month.

The mayor appeared with Jim Newsome, the president and CEO of the South Carolina State Ports Authority, on a wind-swept pier Monday to discuss the development.

"There is absolutely no more important thing that could happen than what happened today," Newsome said. "The Obama administration was very willing to listen to us and listen to our arguments to why this is important."

Both credited U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., and U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Republican, for their work.

"The president's budget has recognized the Port of Charleston study is important," Graham said. "This is good news for 2013, but we have a long way to go."

The president is asking for the money to continue the study during the federal fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

A year ago, the president's budget ignored Charleston. It left lawmakers scrambling to come up with the federal share of the money to study harbor deepening that local ports officials call their top priority.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers created an account in a federal appropriations bill

and Graham announced last week that \$2.5 million was being made available to continue the study this year.

Graham said the president's budget "as a whole is going nowhere in the Senate. It's more of a political document. But we need to be appreciative that the Obama Administration including \$3.5 million in the budget."

The budget will make it easier to get the money, he added.

"I'm on the Appropriations Committee. It allows me to appropriate money for the study without it being considered an earmark," Graham said.

Clyburn called putting the money in the budget "great news great news for Charleston and our state's economy" and thanked the president.

"We're extremely overjoyed," said Lt. Col. Ed Chamberlayne, the district engineer for the Charleston District of the Army Corps of Engineers, which is doing the harbor study. He said if Congress appropriates the \$3.5 million, 7 percent of the money for the study will be in hand.

Obama seeks \$3.5M for Charleston Harbor deepening

"This allows us to move aggressively on our schedule and streamline where we can," he said. The corps is in the first year of its study, which the agency has said could take five to eight years.

Right now, Chamberlayne said the estimate is closer to five and, if everything continues to go well "we could beat that estimate but right now we're still in year one."



Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr., left, listens as South Carolina State Ports Authority president and CEO Jim Newsome speaks with reporters Monday in Charleston about

the Charleston Harbor shipping channel deepening project. President Obama has included \$3.5 million in his proposed 2013 budget for a study of the project.

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