United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 29, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We understand that the governors of impacted states, representatives of industry, and others have written seeking action by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to prevent an economic calamity in the center of our nation. We write in strong support of their request. Absent emergency action to ensure that water levels do not fall below the level needed to support the navigation channel, commercial navigation on the middle Mississippi River between St. Louis, MO, and Cairo, IL, will be severely impaired as early as mid-December. Substantial curtailment of navigation will effectively sever the country's inland waterway superhighway, imperil the shipment of critical cargo for domestic consumption and for export, threaten manufacturing industries and power generation, and risk thousands of related jobs in the Midwest.

Given the magnitude of the economic impact that would result from a potentially months-long loss of navigation on the Mississippi, we support an emergency directive to permit additional water flows from Missouri River reservoirs to maintain navigation on the Mississippi, and to waive Federal Acquisition Rules (FAR) to allow the Corps of Engineers to expedite blasting of the rock pinnacles near Grand Tower and Thebes, Illinois. These pinnacles pose a hazard to barge navigation during periods of low water levels and their removal will allow commercial navigation on the Mississippi to continue. Once the rocks are removed, additional water flows from the Missouri River would be unnecessary or significantly reduced. Waiving FAR guidelines could allow the Corps to sole source for the work, eliminating the 30-day requirement for bids and allowing the work to proceed in an expedited manner.

The Mississippi River is an artery of commerce critical to the movement of hundreds of millions of tons of essential goods and commodities such as corn, grain, coal, petroleum, chemicals, and many other products important to the national economy. All told, cargo valued at over $7 billion, including 300 million bushels of agricultural products and 3.8 million tons of coal, could experience shipping delays that cause ripple effects and damage local economies up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. In addition, if shipping on the river is impeded, about five million barrels of domestically produced crude oil will not be shipped and purchases of imported crude oil will increase by about $550 million as a result.

Given the potentially large negative impact of this looming disaster, we hope that you will give due consideration to our request.

Sincerely,

Tom Harkin
U.S. Senator

Roy Blunt
U.S. Senator

Mark Pryor
U.S. Senator

Chuck Grassley
U.S. Senator

Al Franken
U.S. Senator

Lamar Alexander
U.S. Senator

Mary Landrieu
U.S. Senator

Mark Kirk
U.S. Senator

Claire McCaskill
U.S. Senator

David Vitter
U.S. Senator

Amy Klobuchar
U.S. Senator

Thad Cochran
U.S. Senator

Joe Manchin
U.S. Senator

John Boozman
U.S. Senator

Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator

Roger Wicker
U.S. Senator

Bob Corker
U.S. Senator