Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative

Policy Platform 2014
• Create policy movement toward managing the Mississippi River as one unified system through the formation of a *Mississippi River Management Plan* that incorporates existing practices into a general management model;

• Foster the continued growth and increased state collaboration between mayors along the waterway and the bipartisan U.S. House & Senate Mississippi River Caucus;

• Establish a National Drought Council that builds off of the 2014 Farm Bill Managers Report calling for greater integration between local governments and the Federal National Drought Resiliency Partnership;

• Establish a multi-agency Federal initiative to develop and implement a coordinated strategy that aids local governments as they address aquatic invasive species in the Mississippi River Basin;

• Economic Development funding priorities:
  Pre-Disaster Mitigation program - $400 million
  Mississippi Valley Division Civil Works Budget - $5.43 billion
  Flood Operations & Mitigation/Assistance - $176.3 million
  USDA Conservation Innovation Grants - $1.6 billion for EQIP
  State Revolving Loan Funds - $2.4 billion
  USDA Rural Business & Cooperative Grants - $57.5 million
  Delta Regional Authority - $12.319 million
Create legislative movement toward managing the Mississippi River as one unified system through the formation of a Mississippi River Management Plan that incorporates existing practices in a general management model

**Background:** The Mayors have drafted directive language that gives guidance for a general Mississippi River Management Plan designed to combine disparate efforts, eliminate duplication, and create better efficiencies around Federal activity.

More importantly, this proposal pursues better performance for the waterway without establishing a new program, authorizing new funding, or expanding authority. Modeled after Title V programs in the 2007 version of WRDA for the Chesapeake Bay, Rio Grande River, and Lower Columbia River, this language for the Mississippi River attempts to make progress in improving the overall environmental health and economy of the Mississippi River main stem system from headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. Different water bodies face different challenges, but similar WRDA programs have made progress toward recovering the delicate ecosystems they are aimed at.

The Chesapeake Bay has seen advances since the 2007 WRDA program was enacted in the areas of nutrient load reductions, habitat rehabilitation, and increased water oxygenation. The Columbia River has also seen enhancements around management actions and improvements to fish survival and/or environmental conditions. The Mississippi too can benefit from such a proposal, but at a more intensive level due to the waterway’s breadth, economic impact, and ecological servicer as the drainage mechanism for over half of the North American continent. The Mayors’ language works to help all industries on the Mississippi including navigation, recreation, energy, and agriculture and is designed around the premise that an environmentally healthy river system is an economically viable system.

**The Issue:** The Mississippi River is the main stem of an inland navigable waterways network 12,350 miles in length, and the reliability of its lock and dam system is vital to that waterway’s and the nation’s economy. The natural resources of the River and its adjacent floodplains and wetlands are in dire need of protection and restoration following decades of benign neglect. However, the reliability of the Mississippi River’s system of locks and dams is becoming progressively worse, and River-focused environmental restoration efforts are negligible and largely inconsequential. For every day the Mississippi River experiences a closure, the nation loses $300 million in economic activity. Federal efforts at environmental protection and restoration along the River, though well-intentioned, are poorly designed and managed, and non-systemic, resulting in multiple and often-conflicting goals and objectives, significant and chronic delays, implementation problems, distrust and frustration.

There are several Mississippi River management efforts being carried out in various sections of the waterway aimed at particular issues for particular industries, but none that creates a platform for a single management approach for the whole River to help all industries. Such on-going studies like USACE Upper Mississippi-Illinois Waterway Restructured Feasibility Study (navigation needs), Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study (aquatic nuisance species), Louisiana Coastal Area Program (Gulf Coast restoration) are all valuable but only include a portion of the River and address only certain challenges. We have an opportunity to pursue directive language that bridges the gaps and takes into account impacts through-out the main stem Mississippi.
Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to:

**Pass a New WRDA in 2014**

- Enact a new WRDA in 2014, which includes directive language that moves management of the Mississippi River toward a systemic model for the entire main stem which will:
  - Move away from the current fragmented governance model toward a more systematic approach of environmental restoration, and water infrastructure maintenance and rehabilitation;
  - Stress Federal partnerships with states, communities and the private sector;
  - Provide for a comprehensive ecosystem management plan with clear, measurable goals for ecosystem preservation and restoration; and
  - Establish a process of collaborative planning among diverse ecosystem stakeholder groups.
**Foster the continued growth and increased state collaboration between mayors along the waterway and the U.S. House & Senate Mississippi River Caucus**

**Background:** A defining piece of the Mayors’ effort around the Mississippi River is to no longer treat the waterway as a segmented resource, but instead as one living system equally impacted by human activity throughout its 2500 mile length from headwaters to Gulf. To this end, Congressional response to needs of the River can be coordinated across all ten states that touch the Mississippi. Such a caucus can be effective in reacting to emergency situations that impact the region like flood events, droughts, or damaging storms.

**The Issue:** The Mississippi River touches ten states, 31 Congressional districts and 124 cities and towns as it flows some 2,530 miles from its source in Minnesota through the nation’s heartland and into the Gulf of Mexico. Until now, with the establishment of the bicameral, bipartisan Mississippi River Caucus, the country’s most significant inland waterway had no unified legislative voice on Capitol Hill to speak and work on behalf of the River and the communities, businesses and natural resources that rely upon it. However, while this is a promising start, the Caucus is still in a formative period and the work ahead of it is significant.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress to:

**Promote the Growth and Effectiveness of the Congressional Mississippi River Caucus**

- Present a united voice in Washington, DC for the communities, residents, businesses and industry along the River and the challenges they face;
- Provide opportunities for bicameral, bipartisan and open discussions of the varied issues that impact the entire reach of the Mississippi River;
- Sponsor informational briefings for members of Congress and collaborates on common legislative goals;
- Encourage and enable Congressional efforts to effectively address flood and drought mitigation, commerce along the River, ecosystem protection and restoration, and the needs of river communities.

**Work Collaboratively with Public and Private Partners**

- With state and local partners, help to develop a strong, sustainable economy and high quality of life for communities along the Mississippi River;
- Facilitate Mayors’ efforts to form the first Governors’ Council for the waterway which will offer a forum to bring together communities and states.
Establish a National Drought Council that builds off of the 2014 Farm Bill Managers Report calling for greater integration between local governments and the National Drought Resiliency Partnership

**Background:** Before the National Drought Resiliency Partnership began assembling, it would be accurate to describe the federal role in responding to drought as *crisis management*. No single federal agency led or coordinated drought programs. Drought-related federal response and recovery was spread-out over three agencies, none of which were FEMA (Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, Farm Service Agency). The 2012 drought reemphasized the need for the U.S. to have national drought preparedness. Though such comprehensive legislation is unlikely in the near-term, the House-passed 2008 and 2013 Farm Bills contained a provision creating a *National Drought Council* which would establish a federal and nonfederal partnership to further national drought policy goals and draft a drought preparedness plan.

**The Issue:** Drought is an accepted natural hazard but one with potentially catastrophic economic, social and ecological consequences. By almost every measure, 2012 was an exceptional year in terms of the breadth of drought conditions throughout the country, particularly in the Mississippi River Basin, known for its significant agricultural production, and the “breadbasket” of the nation. Last year’s drought conditions led to a significant deterioration of the Mississippi River region’s crops. According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service, grain prices rose 2.5% to 3.5% while meat, poultry, and dairy prices could rose 3% to 4% in 2013 due in part to the drought. Some climate models predict even greater future fluctuations in wet and dry years than in the past. The looming prospects of extended droughts and more arid reference conditions in the country’ mid-section mean that Federal programs and water projects, envisioned and built on the basis of 20th Century climate assumptions, will face new challenges in the changing climate of the 21st Century. Despite these formidable projections, the Federal government lacks a cohesive national drought policy, focuses on drought response at the expense of drought preparation, and lacks a lead agency coordinating existing Federal drought programs. The NDRP is beginning to address these issues, but the local government piece is still to be designed.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to:

**Work with Mayors, County Executives, and Governors to build a strong drought management infrastructure**

- Make local, state, and tribal stakeholders an integral part of constructing national drought preparedness and response policy;
- Provide clear and easy opportunities for local governments to have a role in the NDRP, including creating a plan to coordinate federal polices with state and local policies and establishing robust outreach with communities;
- Coordinate the delivery of Federal services through cooperation and collaboration with state, tribal and local governmental and private entities.
- Reauthorize and upgrade NOAA’s national drought monitoring program, the National Integrated Drought Information System, for the next five years, to assure enhanced observation networks, monitoring and prediction, and delivery of drought information.
• Examine and improve how the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, the two major Federal water management agencies, plan for and respond to severe drought and account for its impacts;
• Develop a commodity stabilization plan and resource conservation protocol that activates at pre-determined thresholds during the onset period of drought impacts.

**Look Toward Drought Preparation and Mitigation – Not Simply Drought Response**

• Develop and implement laws and policy that prioritize readiness over insurance, insurance over assistance, and motivation over regulation;
• Set preparatory- and preparedness-focused research priorities based upon the potential to reduce drought impacts.
Establish a multi-agency Federal initiative to develop and implement a coordinated strategy that aids local governments as they address aquatic invasive species in the Mississippi River Basin

**Background:** Though the attention on invasive species in the Mississippi River has been mostly confined to Asian Carp, there are other non-indigenous aquatic species compromising the ecosystem. In the 112 Congress, there was the *Stop Invasive Species Act* (HR 4406), introduced by Dave Camp (MI) on the House side and Debbie Stabenow in the Senate (S 2317). This bill has not been reintroduced in the 113 Congress. Instead, legislation has focused singularly on Carp with Betty McCollum’s (MN) bill *Strategic Response to Asian Carp Invasion Act* (HR 358). All of these bills are good starts, but provide little specifics around resources for localities to battle this problem and restore the ecosystem. Further, there is less robust language aiding market-driven solutions such as commercial fishing and processing for consumption. Ideally, there would be the establishment of a start-up program to help these commercial options become more viable in the marketplace.

**The Issue:** Each year, the number of introduced nonnative aquatic plant and animal species invading the Mississippi River increases. Once established, these invasive species (“aquatic nuisance species” or “ANS”) are nearly impossible to control, and then only at great expense. They threaten the sustainability and very existence of the River Valley’s built and natural resources. Adverse economic, social and environmental impacts include reduced game fish, and native plant and animal populations, ruined boat engines and steering equipment, rivers and lakes made unusable to boaters and swimmers, dramatically increased costs of operating drinking water and power plants, locks, dams and industrial processes, degraded ecosystems, compromised human health and lowered property values. According to the USGS, the cost of invasive species (terrestrial and aquatic) in the United States is more than $100 billion annually. All of these impacts collectively significantly distress the economy of the region’s many River-dependent communities. The Mississippi River and its principal tributaries provide a highway for ANS to travel from the Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes to the interior of North American. Most recently, large numbers of several species of nonnative, Asian carp have been making their way upstream in the Mississippi River Basin. Because of the ability of many nonnative fish species, such as Asian carp, to compete with and displace native species, invasive fish will remain a principal threat to native biodiversity and the economy of the Mississippi River.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to:

**Establish a Multi-Agency Federal ANS Task Force**

- Establish a multi-agency Federal task force to plan, design and then implement a coordinated program to help control existing ANS populations and to prevent the introduction and spread of additional ANS in the Mississippi River Basin.
Assure that the Task Force Evaluates Current Conditions, and Predicts and Plans for the Future

- Aiding local governments as they address ANS in the Mississippi River Basin;
- Measuring current and forecasting future ANS populations within the River Basin;
- Identifying aquatic ANS pathways that may exist into the Mississippi River Basin from outside basins and coastal areas;
- Preparing an inventory of current and future potential River Basin ANS;
- Analyzing possible controls to prevent or reduce the risk of ANS transfer into and within the Basin;
- Analyzing ANS impacts upon the economy and environment in the River Basin; and
- Developing a plan to prevent or reduce the risk of ANS transfers within and into the River Basin.

Maintain Existing ANS Investigation and Management Initiatives

- Using the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Inter-basin Study by the Army Corps of Engineers, begin the selection process for methods by which two-way separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River can be accomplished;
- Work with the Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative as well as those of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative to make local governments an integral part of reestablishing the historical barrier between the two water systems.
**Economic Development Funding Priorities**

**Background:** The Mississippi River Valley Economic Development Appropriations priorities of the Mayors reflect a compelling human need around growing the essential economy of the Mississippi River in a sustainable manner. These Federal accounts are critical to building economic prosperity and ecological integrity throughout the region and are valuable due to their performance and return history. These accounts, in essence pay for themselves and create growth through much-needed leveraging within the public and private sectors.

*Preserve the Pre-Disaster Mitigation program, (fund at President’s request of $400 million)*

**The Issue:** The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA's) Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program has effectively reduced threats to Mississippi River Valley populations and structures at risk by funding preparation in advance of natural disasters, while also reducing the River region’s reliance upon Federal post-disaster recovery funds. PDM provided over $70 million in pre-disaster planning and mitigation to 39 states and territories in 2011, saving money by investing in disaster preparation. Every $1 spent on disaster mitigation yielded $4 in benefits. We applaud the Administration’s renewed support for the value of PDM as a program that protects our communities and makes our economies more resilient. However, placing PDM into the new *aspirational* budget for the Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative (OGSI) may reduce the program’s chances of being funded at all.

**Therefore,** the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to preserve and fully fund the Federal Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program at the President’s FY 2015 requested level of $400 million.

*Mississippi Valley Division Civil Works Budget, (fund at FY 2014 level of $5.43 billion)*

**The Issue:** The Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works program budget funds the development, management, restoration and protection of the Mississippi River's water, wetlands, and related resources, through studies, construction, and operation and maintenance of projects. The Army Corps of Engineers, Mississippi Valley Division civil works program manages critical activities needed to reduce the risk of flood impacts in River communities, facilitate economically vital waterborne transportation, restore significant aquatic ecosystems, generate low-cost renewable hydropower, and support the River region's jobs. However, despite the critical nature of such projects, the Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works programs would be funded at $4.5 billion; a significant $934 million, or 17 percent decrease from the program’s 2014 enacted level.

**Therefore,** the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors urge Congress to oppose cuts to and support the maintenance of the Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works program budget at the fiscal year 2014 funding level of $5.43 billion. In particular, the mayors urge support for full funding for the Army Corps’ Mississippi Valley Division civil works program.
**Flood Insurance & Mitigation Operations/Assistance, (fund at FY 2014 level of $176.3 million)**

**The Issue:** The National Flood Insurance Program helps to reduce the risk of flood damage to buildings and infrastructure by providing flood-related grants to communities and others, including $24 million to fund FEMA’s flood mitigation and insurance operations, and $150 million in mandatory funding that will be used for flood mitigation assistance and actions to increase the nation’s resiliency to floods. Despite the urgent need for flood mitigation assistance and projects, the President’s proposed fiscal year 2015 funding level of $150 million represents a $26.3 million reduction from the enacted fiscal year 2014 amount.

**Therefore,** the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors urge Congress to oppose cuts to and support maintaining vital FEMA flood insurance and mitigation operations, and mitigation assistance funding at the higher fiscal year 2014 funding level of $176.3 million.

**USDA Conservation Innovation Grant, (fund EQIP at authorized amount of $1.6 billion)**

**The Issue:** Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive USDA grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands, a vital resource that is key to the sustained economy and environment of the Mississippi River region. Among others, CIG grant applications are accepted from local governments. As demand for local food significantly outpaces supply, the Mississippi River cities and towns are looking more and more beyond local food markets, alone, into the development of regional food systems, which can supply fresh, healthy food to the region’s consumers, bring the next generation of farmers into agriculture, and protect vital farmland—especially on the rural/urban interface. Mississippi River communities look to leverage CIG grant funds to explore innovative approaches to develop economically robust and sustainable regional food systems, and conserve the River region’s farmland in the process.

Funding for the CIG program is estimated at $25 million under the President's 2015 budget proposal, provided with mandatory farm bill (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) dollars. However, over the past decade, and particularly in the last few years, Farm Bill mandatory conservation spending has been routinely cut in Congressional appropriations bills through the “changes in mandatory program spending” (CHIMPS) approach.

**Therefore,** the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors ask Congress to fund the USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP) at the farm bill-mandated level of $1.6 billion without subsequent “CHIMPing” by congressional appropriators, so that the River region’s cities and towns can avail themselves of the economic and environmental sustainability investment opportunities made possible through the Conservation Innovation Grants.
Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Loan Funds, (fund at 2.4 billion)

The Issue: As in the President’s FY 2014 Budget, significant cuts to the Drinking Water and Clean State Revolving Funds are proposed for FY 2015. This reduction of $581 million below the FY 2014 enacted level for a FY 2015 request of $1.8 billion is identified as a targeted spending reduction with the available money being focused on communities most in need of assistance. However, in the wake of the chemical spills in West Virginia, protection of valuable drinking water sources is now more important than ever.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors ask Congress to make no further cuts to the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Loan Funds and consider moving legislation introduced to sustain our fragile but essential drinking water supplies such as SB 1961, the Chemical Safety and Drinking Water Protection Act of 2014.

USDA Rural Business & Cooperative Grants, (fund at President’s request of $57.5 million)

The Issue: The Department of Agriculture's (USDA’s) Rural Business Opportunity Grants (RBOG) have historically been used by rural communities with exceptional needs in the Mississippi River region to promote sustainable economic development by funding community economic development, technology-based economic development, feasibility studies and business plans, leadership and entrepreneur training, rural business incubators, and long-term business strategic planning. The President has proposed in his fiscal year 2015 budget to incorporate the successful RBOG program into a new Rural Business and Cooperative Grants Economic Development Grant Program (funded at $57.5 million), designed to target small and emerging private businesses and cooperatives in rural areas with populations of 50,000 or less. We anticipate that the consolidated grant program will further improve the USDA’s rural economic grant allocation and evaluation process.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors ask Congress to support the establishment of and $57.5 million in funding for a new USDA Rural Business and Cooperative Grants economic development grant program.

Delta Regional Authority States’ Economic Development Assistance Program, (fund DRA at President’s request of $12.319 million)

The Issue: The Delta Regional Authority is congressionally-mandated to identify and provide investments to help grow the small business and entrepreneurial communities in the 252 counties and parishes of the Mississippi River Delta (encompassing parts of eight states). Collectively, those counties and parishes make up the most economically and socially distressed area of the country. The rate of persistent poverty in that region is 370 percent higher than the national average. The Delta Regional Authority has worked to improve the lives of the 10 million people in the Delta. Targeted investments in each of the eight states have created over 9,000 jobs and retained more than 7,500 jobs.
The Delta Regional Authority’s States’ Economic Development Assistance Program supports business incubators, job training and workforce development programs, and infrastructure and industrial development to attract new business investments, all of which increase opportunities for high-skill jobs for Delta residents.

In the President’s fiscal year 2015 budget plan, the Delta Regional Authority is funded at $12.319 million; a modest but appreciated 2.7 percent increase over fiscal year 2014 funding levels.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress to support the continued, full funding of the Delta Regional Authority and its economic development programs, including, importantly, the States’ Economic Development Assistance Program.