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Contact:

Jim Gwinner 314-791-2774

jgwinner@LS2group.com

**MAYORS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER STATEMENT ON TROPICAL STORM HARVEY:
Lessons Learned From Hurricane Katrina; Urge Policy Solutions To The National Flood
Insurance Program And Disaster Resilience; Brace For Possible Impacts As Harvey
Moves North Along The Mississippi River Valley**

SAINT LOUIS, MO: “Our hearts go out to the communities of southeast Texas. Having lived in the center of Katrina’s impacts where 80 percent of our area was under water, the devastation surrounding Houston hits home for us,” said Mayor Belinda Constant of Gretna, LA and Co-Chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative.

August 28, 29 mark the anniversaries of Hurricanes Katrina and Isaac entering the Mississippi River Valley causing nearly \$85 billion in actual damages. Over 1,800 people lost their lives to Hurricane Katrina which directly impacted nearly 90,000 square miles impacting more than 15 million people through evacuations and/or direct economic disruptions. Now, the costs of Harvey could exceed all previous storms.

“The federal supplemental spending tab for Hurricane Katrina was \$110 billion; the cost of Hurricane Isaac was \$2.4 billion; the cost of the 2012 drought was \$35 billion; the Baton Rouge area sustained \$10 billion in impacts last August; we’re now above \$50 billion in impacts along the entire Mississippi River since 2011. So, as mayors we’re concerned about these skyrocketing costs and have urged more attention to the programs that help us prepare before the disaster hits,” explained Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome of Baton Rouge, LA.

Mayors along the waterway have successfully worked with the Mississippi River Caucus in the U.S. House and Senate to increase support for the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant program from \$22 million to \$100 million for the last two spending cycles in a row.

“We’ve been able to make some headway with Congress and FEMA over the last couple years. FEMA has been an exceptional partner in being open to and implementing our proposals to better prepare our areas for disasters. Recently, however, we were dealt a reverse with the rescinding of Executive Order 11988 which required federal agencies to avoid development in flood plains where such development would incur impacts,” said Colin Wellenkamp, MRCTI Executive Director.

There is mounting concern regarding the Nation’s fiscal ability to address disasters. The National Flood Insurance Program is nearly \$24 billion in debt which is larger than the entire annual budget for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“The National Flood Insurance Program is up for reauthorization this year. This is an opportunity to make changes that will help FEMA administer the program more sustainably. Changes that could better inform homebuyers of risk, make it easier for buyouts in flood-prone areas, and empower cities to manage high risk areas,” stated Chris Coleman, Mayor of St. Paul, MN and Co-Chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative.

Cities along the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to Memphis are predicted to be in the path of Tropical Storm Harvey late this week.

Mayors are in close contact with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Weather Service, and emergency managers as this storm proceeds. Cities along the River are taking steps to make sure they can respond to impacts quickly. The network of Mississippi River cities allows mayors to keep each other informed and pool resources should large-scale damage occur.

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MRCTI is an effort to bring national attention back to the Mississippi River—America’s most critical natural asset—and cultivate a new level of regional cooperation to make it more sustainable. As the ecological linchpin to the 31-state Mississippi River Basin, the River is responsible for creating nearly \$500 billion worth of U.S. GDP; providing drinking water for more than 20 million; transporting 40 percent of the nation’s agricultural output; and directly supporting over one million jobs and millions more indirectly.