

U.S. Reps. Kind, Craig, and McCollum: Push to keep Mississippi River operational for commercial navigation

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WASHINGTON [9/17/19] – Today, U.S. Reps. Ron Kind (WI-03), Angie Craig (MN-02), and Betty McCollum (MN-04) sent a letter to the Office of Management and Budget pushing for the distribution of \$100 million for the Army Corps of Engineers to address the impacts of this spring's devastating floods along the Mississippi River. The funds were included in the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, and were signed into law by President Trump in June 2019. Those funds have not yet been disbursed so the Army Corps can do their jobs.

Right now, the immediate concern remains keeping the Mississippi River operational for commercial use, which requires additional dredging because of excess sediment build-up this spring. The river is responsible for one-sixth of the nation's intercity cargo and 25% of foreign exports.

“The Inland Waterway System is the transportation artery of the heartland. If this vital segment of the Mississippi River is not maintained to its fully authorized width and depth, the nation's agricultural community will face severe economic consequences in a year of already troublesome market and weather conditions. Congress and the Administration must take decisive action to restore the reliability

of one of our great nation's key trade corridors," said Reps. Kind, Craig, and McCollum in the letter.

A copy of the letter to OMB can be found below.

Dear Acting Administrator Vought:

It has come to our attention that segments of the Inland Waterway System are still experiencing high levels of sediment shoaling from receding flood waters. As a result, the channel is not completely navigable for the barges transporting goods to domestic and international markets. In some areas, only one barge is capable of passing, increasing systematic delays that are already being felt.

Furthermore, we have been informed that the Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District has been conducting emergency dredging to carry out its mission to keep the channel navigable. However, the Corps recently anticipated that the Dredge Goetz would need to cease operations due to insufficient capital remaining after a challenging fiscal year of extensive natural disasters. Although the USACE Mississippi Valley Division and St. Paul District were able to shift funds to Rock Island District for a short-term fix, we collectively seek a long-term and proactive solution.

The U.S. House of Representatives successfully passed H.R. 2157 - Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, 2019 on May 10, 2019. This legislation allotted \$100 million for the Army Corps of Engineers to address record flooding on the Mississippi that destroyed towns, farms, homes in addition to delaying the navigation season by 85 days. Since the Act was signed by President Trump on June 11, 2019, the emergency funds have yet to be distributed. Meanwhile, the viability of our commercial system is now on the verge of a crisis.

We are inquiring about the status of the supplemental funding and when it will be made available. In the statutory language, the Administration is directed to report to Congress within 60 days on the allocation of the funds from the Operations and Maintenance Account. That report was due no later than August 11, 2019. We urge the Trump Administration and Army Corps of Engineers to act swiftly in allocating long-term funding to reinstate emergency dredging operations. Without this immediate action, over 10 reaches of the Mississippi River in the Rock Island District alone are in danger of closure.

The Inland Waterway System is the transportation artery of the heartland. If this vital segment of the Mississippi River is not maintained to its fully authorized width and depth, the nation's agricultural community will face severe economic consequences in a year of already troublesome market and weather conditions. Congress and the Administration must take decisive action to restore the reliability of one of our great nation's key trade corridors.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

Angie Craig Member of Congress
Betty McCollum Member of Congress
Ron Kind Member of Congress