

Congressman Todd Akin Submitted Testimony before the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

November 30, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing on the 2011 Missouri River flood. This flood had a devastating impact on families and businesses up and down the Missouri River, and we need to have a clear understanding of what weather events and human actions led to the flooding so that in the future we can reduce the probability of experiencing a similar flood event. We need to ensure that communities are restored and that levees are repaired quickly.

The Missouri River has played a vital role in the life and economy of the Midwest for centuries. The Flood Control Act of 1944 established much of the flood control infrastructure that remains in place today to mitigate flooding as well as to provide a stable water supply in periods of drought.

The 2011 Missouri River flood was a record breaking event. While the full economic impact is not yet understood, the damages in Missouri are stunning. Missouri farmers suffered severe consequences from the flood and will not be able to rebound over night. A number of concerns have been raised with how the Corps of Engineers managed the river during this flood. The fundamental question is did the Corps take appropriate action in trying to prevent flooding? Additionally, there were reports that the Corps offered to buy flooded farmland at depressed prices, which raised the specter of a potential conflict of interest and sent a very bad message to those affected by the flooding. Thus, Congress should determine if there is any evidence that the Corps exaggerated the flooding or failed to minimize it in order to induce landowners along the river to sell out. Much of the farm land along the Missouri River is extremely valuable and highly productive. While the costs of flood protection should not be ignored, a record breaking flood should not be justification for taking land out of production.

Another major area of concern is the lack of funding for levee maintenance and repair. In a time of constrained financial resources, does it make sense to pour millions of dollars into environmental restoration while our levees are not in good condition? Congress should make it clear that protecting the lives and livelihoods of our people is the top priority on the Missouri River.

Our first priority should be the restoration of communities affected by the flooding, which includes full repair of the levees. Congress and the Corps should work together to rapidly repair damaged flood control structures which normally protect the homes, fields, and businesses of those who were affected by this massive flood. Together we should be learning from this flood to reduce the likelihood of future floods, as well as making sure that we provide stable water supply during periods of drought in the region.

I am hopeful that the Congress and the Corps can work together to find a solution that both provides flood control and ensure that the Missouri River is a beneficial resource that balances the needs of the stakeholders throughout the Missouri River Basin.

Thank you again for holding this hearing. I am looking forward to working with you on this issue as we move forward.

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