

The Mississippi River is a great blessing from God. Besides being the largest river in our nation it is a major vehicle of commerce. It physically borders the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. In addition to that, its tributaries reached out to a total of 31 states. A significant amount of ports handle the robust amount of shipping that occurs 24/7 on this magnificent consortium of water.

A few years ago, the Asian Carp invaded the Mississippi River through fishing farms that flooded into the River. There was movement from some groups to cut off the Illinois River from flowing from the Mississippi River into Lake Michigan to prevent further spread of the fish. We joined in the fight against this radical solution. Eventually they found ways to stop the spreading of this unwanted species without killing commerce throughout the Midwest and Great Lakes regions. There was just no way they were going to shut down any part of the Mississippi River. That's how important it is.

Now we have a different crisis. The area along the northern end of the river is facing a drought. It rivals the drought of 1989. It is threatening reduced commerce along the river. The reduced depth of the River is making shipping somewhat prohibitive. Companies in the navigation industry along these rivers are now shipping less material by "light loading" fleets which make each load less profitable. In addition to the low levels of water, rocks known as pinnacles are emerging through the shallow levels and risking serious damage to the vessels.

If the Mississippi River becomes closed to commerce, that will also affect shipping on the Ohio and Missouri rivers and make the Great Lakes a one way shipping vehicle. It would halt 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. Cargo valued at over \$7 billion, including 300 million bushels of agricultural products and 3.8 million tons of coal could experience serious delays that will have a ripple effect and damage all of our local communities. Let's not overlook the likelihood of five million barrels of domestically produced crude oil not being shipped and purchases of imported crude oil will increase by about \$550 million as a result.

This situation is a job killer! Lost of jobs and skyrocketing of consumer prices will further hurt our weak economy. However, there is a simple solution to this state of misfortune. All the President has to do is to instruct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to continue, in fact increase, the flow of waters coming from the Missouri River dams and reservoirs. Right now the Corps is scheduled to actually stop these flows of water by mid December through the spring. They

aren't scheduled to dredge and remove the rock pinnacles located between St. Louis and Cairo, IL until late spring. Shutting the water flows now and waiting to dredge and remove the pinnacles is a "blue print" for disaster. The President can do this by simply declaring an emergency and implement the "Stafford Act". If there ever was an "emergency"; this is it!

The protocol for having the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manage the water system of the Mississippi River was created as a result of the Great Flood of 1927. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover became immensely popular for successfully managing this task. It was the biggest reason he was elected President in 1928. However, he segregated the victims by race and broke many promises made to the "Colored Advisory Commission". This caused much disappointment among African Americans who were predominantly members of the Republican Party. The emergence of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his First Lady, Eleanor, who reached out to African Americans changed the whole demographic. Blacks started moving over to the Democratic Party.

We need more of a public outcry on the River situation. Pleas for the President to react accordingly have come in writing by the Governors of Illinois, Missouri and Iowa. 15 U.S. Senators have also written pleading for the President's action. Also, 62 members of the House of Representatives have written including members of the Congressional Black Caucus (Elijah Cummings, Lacy Clay, Cedric Richmond, Bennie Thompson, Emanuel Cleaver, Terri Sewell, Danny Davis and Bobby Rush).

It is time for all of us to show big time concern. Call your senator, congressperson, governor and talk it up on your favorite radio talk show. Write to people as I am doing now. We don't need additional hits to our economic situation. The nation is fragile and good stewardship with rapid action is needed.

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