

**Statement  
Of  
John Charles Edwards, General Counsel & Economic Development Director  
Helena-West Helena/Phillips County Port Authority  
Before  
The Mississippi River Commission  
Helena, Arkansas  
August 16, 2016  
(Final Revision)**

Good Morning:

My name is John Edwards and I serve as the General Counsel & Economic Development Director of the Helena-West Helena/Phillips County Port Authority. I have been responsible for the day to day management of the Port Authority for the past 22 months and it has been an interesting and critical time in our history.

Prior to coming into this position, I must confess that I never fully valued the navigation system of our nation, and particularly what we have on the Mississippi River. Since taking this position, and I never cease to be awe of this river and the people who work on and with it every day.

11 years ago this month, my National Guard unit, the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, was called to service in New Orleans to evacuate the people at the Convention Center. We had just returned from Iraq 4 months earlier, we would end up spending months in Louisiana helping the people there.

If my time there taught me anything, it was that Mother Nature was the boss, and we had better learn how to live with the boss. To me this means working with leaders such as yourselves and Members of Congress to develop comprehensive plans to best utilize and protect the precious asset the Mississippi River is to our nation. This means flood control, a safe and reliable navigation system, and protecting our valuable water resources for agricultural, recreational, and drinking water use.

The Board of Directors of the Port Authority initially hired me to evaluate how to make it a place where commerce and job creation could exist. One of the first things I found was that the appropriate emphasis had not been placed on infrastructure that would make the Port Authority a viable place to do business. We have and are changing that. In 2015, the Port Authority gained natural gas service and was certified a Fiber Ready site by AT&T. Working with our partners the Delta Regional Authority, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Walton Family Foundation, and the Genesee & Wyoming Railroad, the short-line serving Phillips County was rebuilt and reopened for service in October of 2015.

We are now in a position to take advantage of this great river and bring jobs to Phillips County. We are currently working with prospects that are interested in barge traffic. They are looking at us because of this river and the investments that have been made in the navigation system, like the dredging that takes place for the harbors. They are looking at us because of our flood control assets. Taking a comprehensive approach to the use of this river is paying dividends to this region and our nation.

We have two harbors here in Phillips County. I can state that now, more than ever, a reliable dredging program is vital to our future. We have real prospects that are looking for the reliability that comes from a properly maintained navigation system. We are making great strides in Phillips County and are working to uphold our end of the bargain to bring jobs to the area.

We have a river that is the envy of the world. It has sustained the United States over the ages, and will do so well into the future if we demonstrate the leadership to make the needed investments to promote and protect one of the most cost effective transportation and flood control system known to man. Helena Harbor is committed to help in this effort and we sincerely appreciate the efforts of the Commission and of the Memphis District of the US Army Corps of Engineers.

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