

Dear Dr. Movassaghi:

Thank you for the statement made on your behalf by Mr. Ed Preau at the public meeting of the Mississippi River Commission in Greenville, Mississippi, on April 9, 2003. A copy of this letter is being sent to Mr. Preau. Mr. Preau presented comments on the following areas of concern or interest to your office,

a. Discussed progress on the Sicily Island and Aloha-Rigolette projects.

b. Discussed the importance of a continued level of funding for the Main Line Mississippi River Levees project that does not fall below the capability of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

c. Expressed concern over the apparent dwindling of interest in the MR&T Project.

d. Requested support for a higher level of funding for the entire Civil Works Program in the Vicksburg District.

The final two construction items of the Sicily Island project, Levee Items 1-C and 1-D and Billy and Falcon Bayou plugs, were completed in September 2002. The dedication ceremony for the project was held on June 16, 2003. We are pleased to report that during the heavy rainfall that occurred from February 21-23, 2003, the project performed as expected. The Haha Bayou and Fool River pump stations and floodgates effectively removed the 5.5 inches of rain that fell in the area with no homes reported flooded.

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Construction is progressing well on the Aloha-Rigolette project. We completed Item 2, low-flow structure, in May 2003. The only remaining work is Item 3, clearing and snagging, which is 15 percent complete and scheduled for completion in the spring of 2004.

The Mississippi River Levees feature of the MR&T project is 92 percent complete. However, levee work still remains to be done in the Memphis, New Orleans, and Vicksburg Districts.

While the majority of the levee raising is in the Vicksburg District, substantial progress is being made. In Louisiana, approximately 114 miles of main line Mississippi River levee remain to be raised. Maximum deficiencies have been reduced from the 7-8 foot range to the 4-5 foot range, with the most deficient areas being raised first. Also, approximately 20 miles of levee in Arkansas needs to be raised about 2 feet. The Vicksburg District anticipates that the levee raise in Arkansas will not commence until some of the more deficient sections in Louisiana and Mississippi are complete. The Vicksburg District is committed to raising these levee sections as quickly as possible in order to protect the State of Louisiana. As you are aware, the Mississippi River Levees completion date of 2031 was based on anticipated Congressional funding; however, the Corps and levee boards have indicated that they have the capability to complete the levee enlargement program by 2020.

We appreciate your concerns about the Fiscal Year 2004 budget amounts in the MR&T project, as well as proposed funding cuts for maintenance dredging of the J. Bennett Johnston Waterway and the "low use" ports within Louisiana. If you are successful in having funds added by Congress in Fiscal Year 2004, the Corps is ready to accomplish this much needed work upon receipt of the additional funding. However, as you know, funding is ultimately based on national funding priorities. The Administration views commercial navigation as a core mission because of the widespread benefits it provides to the Nation. As you may know, the Fiscal Year 2004 budget gives priority to those ports and harbors that are used for commercial activities or subsistence fishing. Most of the larger ports and harbors provide a more significant economic return to the Nation compared to smaller harbors. Likewise, among inland waterways, the budget gives precedence to waterway segments that have high commercial cargo volumes or low costs per ton-mile of commercial cargo.

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The J. Bennett Johnston Waterway, Lake Providence Port, and Madison Parish Port were funded in Fiscal Year 2003 for annual maintenance dredging. Unfortunately, the budget for these projects in Fiscal Year 2004 does not include funds for maintenance dredging.

The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission.