Testimony for the US Senate Committee on

Environment and Public Works

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Pierre, South Dakota

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

South Dakota is the home to four of the Missouri River's six main stem dams, and our citizens have given more than any other jurisdiction in its efforts to prevent disastrous flooding. Thousands of acres of our richest farm lands were taken from us to construct the Missouri River's four main stem dams and entire communities were relocated. Our residents sacrificed much to prevent flooding not only within our state, but to protect residents and businesses all along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers - from South Dakota to the Gulf of Mexico.

Almost ironically, thousands of South Dakota residents are now recovering from a disastrous flood which these dams were designed to prevent. In the wake of this tragedy, one can't help but asking, "How did this happen?"

- Did management or mismanagement of those dams contribute to the flooding?
- What was unique about this year's runoff and subsequent rainfall?
- Did political influences affect the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Missouri River Management Plan and did it contribute to this flood?
- Most importantly, what should Congress do in the future to assure this NEVER, NEVER occurs again?

South Dakota's state capitol, Pierre, was heavily impacted by flooding. I was notified of possible flooding on Tuesday, May 24, 2011. The following afternoon,

waters from the Missouri River were spilling out of their banks and within a few short days, the city was impacted by significant flooding.

Unlike a traditional flood, which crests and then quickly recedes, residents in Pierre and other South Dakota communities endured an entire summer of flooding. In fact, the waters that spilled into our communities on Memorial Day weekend did not begin to recede until Labor Day weekend.

As the Mayor of Pierre, I lived the nightmare. My staff and I worked non-stop throughout the summer to prepare for flooding, combat the flooding and eventually recover from the flooding. Continuous challenges were met and addressed including: constructing protective levees with only a few days' notice; plugging storm water sewers to prevent flooding within the levees; pumping every drop of rainwater that fell in Pierre; constantly monitoring and repairing levees; sandbagging and monitoring critical infrastructure including drinking water wells; and the list goes on and on. This was a way of life for more than three months and the recovery will last for years.

Like most people in South Dakota, I have many questions related to this disastrous event. But I have only one wish … that flood like this NEVER, NEVER occurs again.

I would like to submit this testimony on behalf of myself and the Pierre City Commission. I believe I echo the thoughts of those of residents up and down the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, regardless of their state residency, political affiliation or socio-economic status.

It is easy to blame others when misfortune affects us. This blame is even easier to place when questions go unanswered and common sense management is not observed.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has taken a great deal of blame for the summer-long flood that affected Pierre and other communities along the Upper Missouri River Basin. Whether this blame is justified remains to be seen, but people have many questions and they are fearful that similar events will occur in the future if these questions are not answered today.

Throughout the years, Missouri River management has gone through many changes and been the center of many struggles. These struggles have been largely the result of competing interests between upstream and downstream states. These interests include, but are not limited to:

- Recreation
- Hydroelectric power generation
- Domestic water needs
- Navigation
- Irrigation
- Fish and wildlife
- Water quality; and of course
- Flood control

All of these interests were described in the 1944 Flood Control Act. They are as much a part of our political landscape today, as they were those days preceding World War II, but there is one reality … the act's primary purpose was flood control.

As time has passed, however, the importance of flood control has become increasingly diluted. Flood control now competes with all of these special interests and the health and welfare of people living along the river's edge is often an after-thought.

Each time the Corps is directed to manage the Missouri River for these special interests, we grow further and further away from protecting upstream and downstream communities. And each time the Corps places a higher importance upon endangered species, a minimally important barge industry or simply political

pressure … we move closer to devastating events like the one we saw this past summer.

Let's talk about flood control and what it means to communities along the Missouri River.

The Oahe Dam is located just five miles upstream from Pierre. The large, earthen structure gave reassurance to those living downstream and most residents were filled with a false sense of security. Among those who placed their faith in the Oahe Dam were lenders and insurance companies who did not require residents along the Missouri River to carry flood insurance. Today, most of the destroyed homes and businesses beneath the dam were not insured for flooding.

The story from Pierre is not unique. Homes, businesses and fertile lands were destroyed from Glasgow, Montana to New Orleans, Louisiana. It is unprecedented that so many communities were impacted by flooding. With this in mind, we must ask ourselves, "Why did this happen? What was different about our river's management and the water flowing through our communities?"

These are things we know:

- The Rocky Mountains received a large amount of snow and run-off was much higher than normal. This is something we knew early in the winter and many expected the basins to fill more quickly. We also know an unprecedented amount of precipitation fell in throughout the Upper Missouri River Basin in May. These figures are available to all of us and I don't believe anyone will challenge the information.

- We also know that Pierre residents were given less than one week to prepare for this unprecedented runoff into the Missouri River. Water from the Missouri River left its banks less than 24 hours after our initial notification of potential flooding.

- We know the projected water elevations and discharge rates changed on a daily basis. In one case, the projected flood elevation changed three times

in one day which created significant challenges for those attempting to protect their homes and businesses.

- We know that a preliminary cost estimate to repair our city's damaged streets, sanitary sewers, storm sewers, water wells, parks, and electrical systems will exceed $16 million. This is only an estimate and costs may be much higher following our winter freeze and thaw.
- We know the flood of 2011 has devastated many of our local businesses. Some of them will never reopen and others will incur losses that may take years to recoup.
- We know the tremendous damages that were inflicted upon more than 300 homes in Pierre. Many residents remain temporarily displaced from their homes and many others will never return.
- We know the tremendous investment our state and communities have made … and will continue to make … in preparing for, managing, and now recovering from this terrible event.
- We know the incredible financial, mental and emotional toll inflicted upon residents that fought this flood for more than three months. Many residents were forced to relocate, while others remained and ran sump pumps that are still running today. And still others gave up after many exhaustive weeks of battling this flood and have no means of repairing or replacing their homes.
- We know that our community is weary, frustrated and seeking many answers from the people who manage the Missouri River. While most floods crest and then recede within days, our residents have lived this tragic event for more than three months.
- And finally … we know that we NEVER, NEVER want to go through this again and we hope the proper steps will be taken to ensure sound, common-sense administration is used in managing the river.

Alternately, there are many things that we do NOT know. For example:

- How did the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manage the information that was available to them in the days, weeks and months preceding this horrific event?
- How were water elevations and discharge rates managed and adjusted throughout the six main stem dams; and at what time were these management decisions made?
- How will our cities and states finance the cost of repairing and replacing our critical infrastructure?
- How will our residents recover from the financial burden of hastily preparing for this event, abandoning their homes, repairing the damage, and bearing the burden of other flood-related costs?
- How will our business community recover from its losses?
- When will our quality of life be restored … our park systems, our golf courses, our bike trails, our athletic fields and our river-based recreation?
- When will we reclaim our streets and how will we repair them?
- But most importantly, when can we begin to feel comfortable that similar events will not reoccur … and when can we return to our homes and businesses and feel safe again? When can we feel that someone in the Corps of Engineers is managing runoff to prevent future flooding?

We do not have answers to these questions, especially those related to future flood prevention. But we do know that our residents have been severely impacted by this flooding and our people are hurting … financially, mentally and emotionally. We cannot go through this again.

I appreciate your time and attentiveness to our questions. We must all work together, seek answers to these difficult questions and assure this flood NEVER, NEVER occurs again. Thank you!