

**Testimony of Congressman Rick Crawford (AR-01)
before the House Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
on the FY 18 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Budget**

March 8, 2017

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Kaptur, and members of the Energy and Water Subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today to provide testimony on the importance of Army Corps of Engineers project funding to the First District of Arkansas.

As you know, the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project, or MR&T, is the largest flood control project in the world. MR&T plays an integral role in protecting the Lower Mississippi Valley from devastating floods and enables continuous navigation along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Since its inception in 1928, taxpayers have received \$46 for every dollar invested in this project, while preventing \$612 billion in flood damages and protecting 4 million residents of the lower Mississippi River Valley.

MR&T also promotes navigation along the river and its tributaries – and helps support a vibrant agriculture economy. Over 500 million tons of cargo move on the Mississippi River system each year, saving billions of dollars in domestic transportation costs and giving U.S. businesses a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

I appreciate the continued support this subcommittee provides for MR&T, and I understand that our current fiscal environment forces us to carefully evaluate where each dollar goes. For MR&T to meet its current challenges, an increase in funding over the current CR funding level of \$290 million is needed for the program to reach its full capability to protect lives, property, and to support commerce. To reach full capacity, the project requires funding of approximately \$500 million. While I recognize the challenging environment of fiscal restraint, I believe that Congress must prioritize the projects that provide taxpayers the best return on their investment. There are few government-funded programs that can boast a 46 to 1 return.

The MR&T program also supports critical water supply projects needed to alleviate the alarming rate of aquifer depletion. Examples from my district include the Grand Prairie and Bayou Meto surface water projects. These are critical infrastructure investments designed to address the depletion of the Alluvial and Sparta aquifers. The loss of these aquifers would not only result in the severe disruption in the agriculture economy of the Delta Region, but municipal and other industrial water uses would also be threatened. The US Army Corps predicts the Alluvial Aquifer will be commercially useless in the near future, and as a result, 66 percent of the Bayou Meto project area will no longer have access to irrigation while 77 percent of the Grand Prairie project area will no longer be able to irrigate.

Unless we deal with this problem now, there will be a water crisis in the future that will strike a severe blow to the economy and quality of life in the already-distressed Arkansas Delta region. I imagine many of the Members of the Subcommittee face groundwater problems in the districts

they represent. But it's important to note is that unlike many Western states, the State of Arkansas does not have access to targeted federal groundwater protection programs, such as those operated by the Bureau of Reclamation. Quite simply, there are no viable alternatives available to my constituents.

While we have not yet seen a detailed FY18 Presidential budget, I am requesting this Committee work with me and my staff to find ways to provide water infrastructure projects an adequate funding stream, including potentially revising the Report Language that authorized expenditures for ongoing work under the MR&T budget.

Last year, the projects in my district barely received enough funding to satisfy existing contractual obligations and staffing needs. Hardly any progress was made on project construction and we currently find ourselves in a protracted holding pattern with no end in sight. The longer the construction process is drawn out, the more costly these projects become to the taxpayer. The rate at which we're operating is unsustainable.

I understand that the Appropriations Committee has limited resources available, and I applaud the work you're doing to support critical water infrastructure projects. I am very grateful for the Subcommittee's continued support for the Army Corps' vital work in the lower Mississippi River Valley. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff as you work through the FY 18 appropriation process.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.