

Testimony of
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Hearing Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works:
“The Importance of Enacting a New Water Resources Development Act”

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Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Boxer, distinguished members of the Environment and Public Works Committee, I am honored to join you today. My name is Kyle Makarios and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters. My union represents 25,000 Carpenters, Pile Drivers, Millwrights and Floor Coverers in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. I also serve on the Board of the Upper Mississippi Waterways Association, a Minnesota-based association of businesses who rely on reliable navigation on the Mississippi River to move goods.

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, my national union, represents over a half million men and women who make their living building our Nation. Many of those members are employed building the projects directly under the purview of this committee – the public works and infrastructure projects that connect our country internally and to the world. Along with several other crafts including operating engineers and laborers, our members perform the bulk of the heavy construction and maintenance of the nation’s ports and waterways, locks, and dams. Every day across the country, thousands of our members go to work for hundreds of construction contractors building and providing maintenance on locks and dams and keeping our key navigation channels open.

I’m here today to assure this Committee that enacting a new Water Resources Development Act is very important to our Nation’s construction workers and the businesses who hire them as well as those that are part of our supply chain. Previous enactments of WRDA have authorized projects which are currently putting thousands of our members to work, and more steps are needed to continue to upgrade and modernize the navigation potential of our country’s inland waterways. As you will hear in other testimony today, the American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2013 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure points out the dramatic need to increase investment in order to ensure reliable, efficient movement of commodities in this country. I applaud the bipartisan effort that this committee has helped lead, both in this Congress and in the previous, to address this urgent need to upgrade both surface and waterways transportation infrastructure.

Not only is enacting a new Water Resources Development Act important to our members who directly work on heavy construction and civil works projects, but it is equally important to many other members. Farmers and businesses rely on a reliable and efficient transportation network to get goods to market. A barge leaving my home town of Saint Paul, Minnesota must travel through 27 lock chambers to get down river to the Port of New Orleans. It is critically important for the economy of states along the Upper Mississippi River that those businesses and farmers have a high degree of confidence in that system so that they can continue to employ our members building and maintaining their grain elevators, manufacturing plants, power generation facilities, cement plants, and hundreds of other businesses that rely on river transportation.

As the Committee considers reauthorization of the Water Resources Development Act, I would respectfully voice support for a couple of key policy initiatives being advocated by the Waterways Council, Inc – a national coalition of which we are a member. We support increasing the existing threshold defining a major rehabilitation project from \$20 million to \$50 million, and authorizing the Calcasieu Lock, Louisiana and the Upper Ohio River Chief's Reports. We also recognize and applaud the waterways industry's successful advocacy for an increase in their own user fee on fuel that was implemented by the last WRDA, and oppose additional fees on the waterways at this time. But it is very certain that Congress should maximize the investment levels in these projects in order to put our members and other construction workers to work.

Mr. Chariman, let me wrap up by reiterating that Congress, and this committee in particular, can serve a critical need for this country by leading a bipartisan effort to ensure that our nation's inland waterways remain a reliable and cost-effective route for moving bulk commodities to and from the businesses and farms in our communities. In doing so, you will directly employ many thousands of construction workers and give confidence to private business whose investments will employ many thousands more.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.