Statement of Senator Claire McCaskill
July 23, 2008
Environment and Public Works Committee
The Midwest Floods: What Happened and What Might be Improved for Managing Risk and Responses in the Future

Chairman Boxer and Ranking Member Inhofe, I want to thank you for holding this hearing. As you are well aware, the entire Midwest Region has been devastated by recent flooding events. Missouri alone has had 22 counties, in addition to the City of St. Louis, declared disaster areas and an excess of 300,000 acres of farm land were flooded, many of which remain under water and unable to be planted. So having this platform to express the needs of many Missourians will help send the signal that Washington is listening.

This past year, Missouri have faced significant hardship. Except for three days in March, Missouri has been under a state of emergency since December 2007 and has had nine federal disasters since June 2007. In fact, in March of this year, Missouri received another significant flooding event where 72 of our counties and the independent city of St. Louis received disaster declarations. Just this one event took several lives and caused millions of dollars of damage across the state. And then we were hit again by last month's epic flooding.

Madam Chairman, I had the opportunity to view some of the affected communities both by land and by air. I was escorted by Col. Lewis Setliff of the St. Louis District of the Army Corps of Engineers who helped guide me through the damage areas and provide me details off their extensive flood fighting efforts. Remarkably, Missourians at the state and local levels came together to prevent a significant amount of damage yet, the devastation was still overwhelming. It was like flying over an ocean right there in Missouri and while it was enough to take your breath away what was more astonishing was the resilience and determination of the people I met. Missourians have an unbelievable ability to overcome when faced with tremendous challenges, just as we did after 1993, but they won't be able to do it without the assistance of the federal government.

Thankfully, during all of the severe weather Missouri has had this past year, none of our federal levees were breached. This is a good sign that the repairs made along the Mississippi after 1993 were a wise investment. However, there is still work to be done. We did have several non-federal levees breach and many others, including some federal levees that are in need of repair. It's imperative that the Corps act swiftly to make the necessary repairs so that these communities are protected from any future weather events.

Finally, Madam Chairman, I would just like to close by stating that while this recent event has caused significant damage to thousands of Midwest communities, I am confident that our local, state and federal entities will do what is necessary ensure they are renewed and revitalized.

This concludes my testimony.

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