

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 29, 2007

The Honorable James Oberstar
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Mica
Ranking Republican
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2163 Rayburn
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
H 218
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Republican
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Jim, John, Dave, and Jerry,

As Members who represent communities on and around the Great Lakes, we are writing to you to express our concerns about harbor dredging in Great Lakes ports. The Army Corps of Engineers has not treated our harbors fairly, and this needs to change. We are seeking your support as leaders of the authorization and the appropriations committees to address this problem in the coming year.

There are two main issues we want to bring to your attention: (1) budget guidelines and criteria for dredging of commercial harbors that hurt small and rural communities, and (2) unacceptably low funding for Great Lakes harbors.

First, we continue to be concerned about a new Corps policy that uses tonnage handled as a standard for deciding which harbors to dredge. We appreciate the support of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in accepting the Stupak-Hoekstra-Delahunt amendment (Sec. 2042) to the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), H.R. 2864, to correct this problem. However, with the failure to pass WRDA into law last year, harbors that do not move a large tonnage – primarily rural areas – are excluded from the Corps' dredging budget. This policy has a hugely detrimental impact on many small towns in the Great Lakes that depend on a vibrant shipping industry for economic livelihood. It will lead to job losses, shipping delays, and hardship for businesses in our communities. The Corps' policy ignores the fact that 2/3 of all U.S. shipping begins or ends at small ports, and a failure to adequately dredge those harbors will harm the whole nation's economy. We hope you will work with us to overcome this bad policy and ensure that these important dredging projects are undertaken.

Second, we are very concerned about the historic and persistent underfunding of Great Lakes dredging in comparison to other Corps districts around the country. For example, in

FY05, Corps dredging of the Great Lakes system was \$87.5 million, or about \$0.52 per ton of cargo carried. By contrast, the Ohio River received \$266.5 million, about \$1.10 per ton of cargo. In FY06, the Great Lakes received \$74.07 million and the Ohio River received \$261.18 million. The Missouri River received about \$15 per ton of cargo carried in FY05. Because of this inequity, our region faces a backlog of over \$200 million in operation and maintenance funding. Shortchanging our harbors and failing to maintain adequate depths forces vessels to carry reduced volume loads, which drives up costs and delays cargo shipments. This inequity must be rectified soon.

The Great Lakes are a national treasure and central to America's shipping infrastructure. Our country cannot afford to neglect the maintenance of the harbors along the nation's fourth coast. We look forward to working with you as your committees consider appropriations and authorization legislation in which we can find solutions to address this problem.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Vernon Ehlers

John Dingell

Carl Kasell

John Conyers

Pete Hockstra

Thaddeus McCotter

Sandy Levin

Phil Ware

Sue Camp

Candice S. Miller

Ben Horowitz

Paul Sarpak
