

United States Senate

August 2, 2016

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army
Department of the Army, Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Lieutenant General Todd T. Semonite
Chief of Engineers
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Secretary Darcy and LTG Semonite:

I urge you to decide against construction of the St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project (Project) currently awaiting a United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) final environmental impact statement (EIS). The Project would create flood risks that could cause irreparable harm to families and devastate the economy of Southern Illinois. I strongly add my concerns to those raised by the Cities of Cairo and Metropolis, Pulaski and Alexander Counties, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

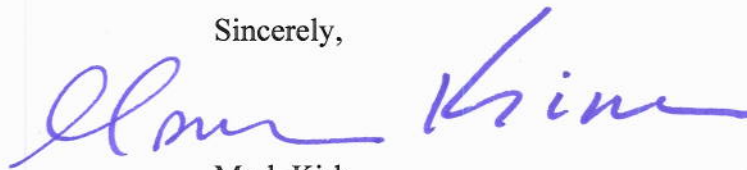
I am concerned that the \$165 million taxpayer funded Project to close the flood outlet gap in the current levee system would promote increased development of the floodway in Missouri, which directly conflicts with the purpose of the area established more than 85 years ago to divert rising flood water away from towns nestled along the river. To protect the lives of individuals and families living in Southern Illinois, the Corps is currently authorized to open the floodway when the river gage on the Ohio River at Cairo, Illinois reaches 58 feet and is predicted to exceed 60 feet, an authority that is left completely to the Corps' discretion. However, during the Mississippi River flood of 2011, legal delays kept the Corps from executing the plan until the river reached 61.72 feet, and in result, Illinois suffered millions of dollars in damages and forced the evacuation of Cairo, Illinois. The delay took place even though 60,000 acres of the New Madrid Floodway in Missouri were already submerged. If the Project is completed and those acres of land are developed, it will become even more difficult to activate the floodway when necessary and the livelihood of my constituents in Illinois could be destroyed.

In addition to Illinois' economic concerns with the Project, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), who maintains veto authority, concluded it would lead to "the greatest loss of wetlands function in EPA Region 7's history." The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded the project "would cause substantial, irretrievable losses of nationally significant fish and wildlife resources, and greatly diminish rare and unique habitats found in southeast Missouri." Rather than force

additional taxpayer spending through the involvement of multiple federal agencies working to stop the project, you have the opportunity to end it today.

To protect the safety and livelihood of Illinois citizens and the precious natural resources of the Midwest, I urge you to not allow this project to go forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Kirk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark Kirk
U.S Senator