Investments in water resources infrastructure are investments in the long-term strength and security of the nation.

Reliable, well-maintained water resources infrastructure is fundamental to America’s economic and environmental well-being and is essential to maintaining our nation’s competitive position within the global economy. Our water resources infrastructure provides life-saving flood control, needed water supplies, shore protection, water-based recreation, environmental restoration, and hydropower production. Moreover, waterways transportation is the safest, most energy-efficient and environmentally sound mode of moving freight.

We applaud Congress’s efforts to eliminate wasteful spending, especially given today’s fiscal challenges. But deferring to the Executive Branch the sole prerogative over which projects to initiate, which should receive funding, and the level and priority of funding for each, abdicates Congress’s constitutional role. Such action has resulted in the stoppage, interruption and delay of critical projects. Moreover, the Administration’s priorities, as reflected in the Budget, have seldom been set through an open, deliberative process as have those that have withstood the heavy scrutiny of the congressional committee system.

Congress must reconsider how this country invests in the nation’s water resources infrastructure. Federal water resources projects are different from other Federal programs, projects and activities in the following important ways:

- Each project is formulated separately to address a specific and discrete problem;
- Projects are separately analyzed, are recommended by the Executive Branch and are authorized and funded separately by the Congress based on the benefits accruing individually from each one;
- Each project comprises a separate and distinct Federal investment decision generally independent of other projects and is, therefore, subject to individual appropriations; and,
- Each project also comprises a separate and distinct non-Federal investment decision since non-Federal sponsors agree to pay significant portions of project costs.
Water resources projects are scrutinized to a greater extent than any other capital investment program in the government. Proposed projects are subjected to comprehensive analyses using merit-based criteria, an integral component of which includes extensive public involvement. Further, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986 imposed significant requirements for non-Federal cost-sharing, which were further enhanced by the 1996 and 2007 WRDAs.

Congress authorizes and appropriates funding only for water resources projects that meet very rigorous tests, specifically, those that survive very detailed analyses and which non-Federal governments and local sponsors support through contributions of substantial shares of project costs.

When the Congress has started construction of a project, it has made a commitment to follow through triggering local governments to also make major commitments – financial and political. Having made that commitment, the Congress should assure that it is honored. Turning all discretion over to the Executive Branch, which may not feel compelled to honor the commitments made by Congress, is unacceptable.

Investments in water infrastructure projects are investments in our nation’s long-term security. Our nation simply cannot afford the negative economic impacts, the diminished export capabilities and the detriment to our way of life that surely would result if we fail to continue these investments. The Congress has a vital role to play in these important – and independent – investment decisions and should assure that the decisions are reached through an open and inclusive process where the needs and priorities of all are considered.

The National Waterways Conference, established in 1960, is dedicated to a greater understanding of the widespread public benefits of our nation’s water resources infrastructure. Our mission is to effect common sense policies and programs, recognizing the public value of our nation’s water resources and their contribution to public safety, a competitive economy, national security, environmental quality and energy conservation. Conference membership is comprised of the full spectrum of water resources stakeholders, including flood control associations, levee boards, waterways shippers and carriers, industry and regional associations, port authorities, shipyards, dredging contractors, regional water supply districts, engineering consultants, and state and local governments.