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**ILLINOIS GOV. PAT QUINN AND LOUISIANA LT. GOV. JAY DARDENNE CALL
ON NATION TO SET A COURSE TO SUSTAIN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER**
National Leaders Gather in Chicago to Discuss saving the "Lifblood of America"

CHICAGO, IL. -- Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn is calling on the nation to be bold in setting a new course for one of America's greatest resources.

"The Mississippi River is America's lifblood, but it has been tested recently by droughts, flooding, pollution and invasive species," Gov. Quinn said. "Whether you look to the Big Muddy to move products to market or for recreation, you cannot ignore the alarms. We must work together to protect this national treasure."

Governor Quinn spoke in Chicago Monday at the final of five leadership forums dedicated to the future of the Mississippi River and convened by the America's WETLAND Foundation.

Chaired by Quinn and Louisiana Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne, *The Big River Works* Initiative brought together leaders from government, the environment, industry and communities with the aim of creating a cooperative path forward for Mississippi Watershed sustainability.

Dardenne joined Quinn in calling for national action.

"Doing nothing is not an option, because doing nothing will lead to the demise of a river system that is the lifblood of this country and one of the fundamental reasons for its success," Dardenne said.

King Milling, chairman of the America's WETLAND Foundation, asked participants the key question: "How long can we continue along without a plan and a firm commitment to action?" This question was raised repeatedly in forums convened in New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, and Minneapolis, where leaders likened the river to an orphan, with no agency having clear authority to preserve the river's ecosystem and the tremendous economic assets it supports.

Major General John Peabody, Commander of the Mississippi Valley Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in reviewing challenges to the river's viability, said that states along the Mississippi River are tightly linked to the one of the world's largest port systems at the river's mouth. "We need to go from theory to practice to articulate a common vision for all who depend on the river. Instead of waiting to respond until disasters strike, the country needs to have a vision and invest in its future," Peabody said.

"Illinois is the transportation crossroads of America," said Roger Dennison of Foresight Energy. "You can't compete with a 20th Century strategy in a 21st Century global economy. Our crumbling river infrastructure is vital to American competitiveness; yet the nation seems intent on choke off one of its major economic drivers."



Baton Rouge Mayor Melvin 'Kip' Holden questioned the wisdom of expecting the federal government to come to the rescue. "We will need to get our political forces organized to avoid catastrophes, and once and for all we need to link environmental needs to commercial prosperity. This country can no longer afford to allow parochialism, partisanship and special interests to drive the agenda for our river," Holden said.

Jerome 'Zee' Zeringue, Executive Director, Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, warned of consequences of inaction. "We have a choice, we can choose to lose all of the national assets that depend on this river, both here in Louisiana and across the country, or we can choose to make a plan and work together to implement it. "And that's going to take political will and a recognition of the river's vital importance to us all," Zeringue said.

The river gives the U.S. a leg up over other nations, said Del Wilkins, Vice President of Canal Barge Company. "America has a competitive advantage over other nations because we have a waterways system that keeps our inland cities viable. We can use water to bring commerce in and out of America via an incredibly efficient transportation system," Wilkins said.

A navigation industry representative raised the issue of stable funding for river infrastructure maintenance and improvement. Bill Hanson, Vice President of Great Lakes Dredge and Dock, said that delays occur despite the fact that the industry pays into a fund that has millions and is dedicated for just that. "We need to use the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for its intended purpose. If we can't trust the fund we maintain ourselves, then could we trust new ones that are being created?" Hanson said.

The federal government needs to be more proactive, said Michael Lorino of the Associated Brand Pilots of the Port of New Orleans. "We tend to wait for disasters in this country, and the disaster is here now," Lorino said. "It is amazing that our federal government doesn't realize how important it is to get cargo out of the country. We grossly undervalue the Mississippi River."

Dr. Don Boesch, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, said the U.S. need to move from a generational to a legacy approach that includes meaningful, long-term solutions. "We are at the point where we must focus on the entire system and on the issues of matter and energy. In fact, we have so much at stake that we need a "Manhattan" type mega project to protect this most valuable American natural resource," Boesch warned.

Mark Davis, Director of the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy, said the Mississippi River was like an orphan, with many users but no real caretakers. "Given the widespread implications of climate change and changing water demand, if we don't plan for the resources of this river, someone else will," Davis said.

"Going forward, we can all agree that the status quo doesn't work," said Ellen Gilinsky, Senior Policy Advisor in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Water. "We all share a common goal of clean water – for today and for tomorrow – and we all need to work together towards that goal."

Gen. Peabody prioritized the need for collaboration. "We risk fatal failure here in two ways – the failure of imagination, and the failure of cooperation. And the second is by far more important. There's no



shortage of good ideas out there, but we need to cooperate to implement a vision for the river,” said Gen. Peabody.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Under Secretary Ann Mills also echoed the call for more cooperation. “Agriculture plays a tremendous role in this basin. And bringing together a diverse network of public and private partners who are committed to improving the Mississippi River is important to conserve our nation’s largest river system,” said Mills. “The USDA is using this partnership-based approach with our *Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative* to accelerate focused voluntary conservation.”

Iowa Soybean Association representative Roger Wolf emphasized that Midwest farmers are mindful about the river’s future and are natural stewards of their lands and waters. “This is about the business of sustainable agriculture, and we are going to miss opportunities to stay competitive if we don’t think about the river’s sustainability. If you talk to farmers, sustainability isn’t just about business. It’s about family, communities and future generations,” Wolf said.

Speaking on behalf of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative, Mayor Tom Thomson of Grafton, Ill, reiterated the need for communities and citizens to rededicate themselves to the river. “This river is beautiful and important. – It is our sacred trust – and we are charged with taking care of it. Our environment, our economy and our people all depend upon it. This is why we are coming together.” The mayor’s group supported the creation of the burgeoning Congressional River Caucus, an effort led by U.S. Senators Tom Harkin, D-IA, and Roy Blount, R-Missouri.

Speaking by video, Sen. Harkin joined in the call for action. “To meet the future demands placed on it by so many interests and economic sectors, the river’s health as an ecosystem must be maintained,” Harkin said. “To move in such a direction, the nation must place a renewed emphasis on the Mississippi’s significance, and, together as leaders, we must continue building a diverse coalition dedicated to saving the Mississippi for future generations.”

VIDEO LINKS FOR GOV. QUINN AND LT. GOV. DARDENNE:

Lt. Gov. Dardenne:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm9qjIFjoPI&list=UUXORWe3rZJ9oOxwZrZF3WXA&index=5>

Gov. Quinn Part 1:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4HCsbBWGUc&list=UUXORWe3rZJ9oOxwZrZF3WXA&index=4>

Gov. Quinn Part 2:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5OFeo0_3xY&list=UUXORWe3rZJ9oOxwZrZF3WXA&index=3

The America’s WETLAND Foundation manages the largest, most comprehensive public education campaign in Louisiana’s history, raising awareness of the impact of Louisiana’s wetland loss on the state, nation and world. Through its America’s Energy Coast initiative, the Foundation works to sustain the environmental and economic assets of the Gulf Coast region. THE BIG RIVER WORKS project will increase cooperation along the Mississippi River by outlining the key issues that must be addressed by comprehensive river management. For more information visit www.americaswetland.com or www.bigriverworks.org.