

Waterways Council Inc.

Keeping Our Competitive Edge

By Cornel Martin



At press time, we await the release of the President's FY 2012 budget that will provide an initial funding level for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works program for the year. Indications are that the Corps' budget will be slashed significantly from even last year's reduced levels. This is not only problematic for the Corps and its Civil Works mission, but for the nation overall as well.

America's inland waterways are a precious resource and the envy of the world because of the natural "water highway" the waterways system provides for commerce. Modern lock and dam infrastructure is critical to U.S. competitiveness in the world market, to environmental protection, to energy efficiency, to the sustainment of well-paying American jobs and to congestion relief. Inland waterways transportation is a key component of the intermodal transportation network, and is essential to our nation's economy, environment, and our quality of life.

In addition to the Waterways Council's work on Capitol Hill and within the Administration to educate decision-makers about the value of this system and why it is worth investment, we have been traveling the country to talk to reporters and visit with newspaper editorial boards to bring attention to the importance of inland waterways

transportation and lock and dam infrastructure. *The Wall Street Journal* published an informative article about the maintenance challenges to our navigation system in December, and before that an article on dredging funding challenges near New Orleans. Positive editorials have most recently been published in the *Paducah (KY) Sun*, *Quad City Times*, and the *Des Moines Register*.

While the media is opening its eyes to the importance of our waterways system to the nation, we can only hope that the Administration and those in Congress will begin to understand and embrace this system that provides our nation with economic prosperity, jobs, and exports of our agricultural products in the most environmentally friendly, fuel and cost-effective way.

On November 3, 2010, President Obama, discussing the importance of exports to the nation's economy said, "The most important contest we face is not the contest between Democrats and Republicans. In this century, the most important competition we face is between America and our economic competitors around the world."

Monsanto TV and radio commercials have been highlighting that nine billion people are expected to inhabit the Earth by the year 2050. How will the world feed those people? Grain and other agriculture products moved on our nation's waterways for export comes to mind immediately, but reliable infrastructure must be there to support

such volume.

The Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan, the comprehensive, consensus-based package of recommendations that addresses the need to improve the continued vitality of the U.S. inland navigation system, is a way to assure more reliable infrastructure. It would allow the completion of navigation projects on time, on budget and in a more efficient way than ever before so that the export challenges now and in the future can be met. This plan was developed over a year-long period by the Inland Marine Transportation System Investment Strategy Team, composed of key U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel and members of the Users Board. It is supported by more than 200 stakeholders including members of the conservation community, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, industry shippers and users, energy companies, and more. For a copy of the full report and recommendations, and to endorse the plan, visit the Waterways Council's web site (www.waterwayscouncil.org).

And while our nation takes its time evaluating the importance of waterways infrastructure, other countries are marching ahead by developing and upgrading their own systems in order to compete with the United States. In Brazil, for example, construction has just begun on two large hydroelectric dams at a cost of \$15 billion in the Western Amazon region, the first of 24 dams planned for that area. We must as a nation look beyond today at the challenges that lie ahead and reinvest in waterways infrastructure that keeps America moving, keeps it strong, and gives it a competitive edge.

MN