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America at war

Waterways: A priority

The government's chief obligations are safeguarding the citizenry and providing the infrastructure through which Americans may seek economic reward.

The nation's system of ports and waterways fits snugly into that paradigm. They are, in fact, far more efficient than highways and are essential to the economy. Need we remind that the economy is essential to generating the resources needed to defend the nation?

We are at war, but the federal government has performed so poorly over the years that the American Society of Civil Engineers last year gave the infrastructure on our navigable waterways a humiliating D-plus.

There is a backlog of some \$38 billion in authorized projects. While demand for transportation on the waterways is expected to double to 4.6 billion tons annually by 2020, more than half of the 194 operational locks are more than 50 years old and have exceeded their design lives.

Consider the Port of Pittsburgh, one of the largest inland river ports in the nation. Elements of locks and dams 2, 3 and 4 on the Monongahela River are 100 years old. Because of funding shortfalls, completion of a modernization project already has slipped by six years and could slip even further to 2017.

Failure of any portion of the waterways' infrastructure would lead to bottlenecks that slow the economy, which, in turn, would undermine the well-being of the nation and its citizens.

That is *unacceptable*.