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MRCTI Co-Chairs' Statement on Release of Mississippi River Basin Report Card

Report Card echoes Mayors' Message that the River is Critical to the United States and Requires National Attention

(St. Louis, MO)—Today, Mayor Francis Slay of St. Louis represented the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) and presented at the release event of the Mississippi River Basin Report Card assembled by America's Watershed Initiative (AWI) in St. Louis.

As Co-Chairs of MRCTI, we are pleased to have supported AWI and their partners in producing a useful snapshot of the 31-state basin comprised of more than 250 rivers including the Mississippi and its major tributaries.

In examining the results of the Report Card, we can say this with all confidence: 'If you agree with the findings it is a good thing the mayors have recently come together to make the Mississippi River more sustainable. We have only been organized for three years and in that short time we have seen improvements to the Mississippi River main stem; but, the main stem is only part of a larger system that requires urgent stewardship.'

The Report Card gives the overall basin a D+, a grade, if accepted, validates what the Mayors of the Mississippi River have been saying to States, Federal Agencies, and Congress since 2012: the River is critical to our nation's prosperity and has been neglected for too long. This neglect is especially prevalent in basin management areas that received the lowest grades. If you look at the grades for areas along the main stem (where mayors have organized thus far) you will see that the worst grades are for the condition of our infrastructure. Those management areas with closer purview to cities certainly have room for improvement, but exhibit better performance overall.

Cities are doing a lot and will continue to grow our efforts, but we can't do it alone. Only 18 percent of nutrient loading into the Mississippi River main stem is attributable to cities. Also, cities are doing what we can with the resources at our disposal to maintain the infrastructure we have jurisdiction over. State and local governments provided \$320 billion of the \$416 billion spent on transportation and water infrastructure in 2014.

Last month, Mayors released an economic profile of the Mississippi River that showed the waterway generated more than double the annual revenue for the nation than previously thought, over \$400 billion. But, the economy that Mayors highlighted is living on borrowed time if we can't address our infrastructure needs and improve our water quality. That is why Mayors also announced last month they would begin developing a clean water program that works to implement the clean water goals already set by the ten Mississippi River states.

The Mississippi River Valley has recently seen its share of reports. We as mayors now urge action. There are federal policy steps that can be taken to improve the basin including robust funding for Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds, Section 106 Water Pollution Control Grants, as well as providing adequate resources to bring our infrastructure to a state of good repair.

Whether one believes a grade of D+ is accurate or not, improvement is warranted and will take the total commitment of leaders well beyond just mayors. We, as mayors, stand ready to bring stakeholders together, marshal urban resources, and provide leadership.

MRCTI is an effort to bring national attention back to the Mississippi River—America's most critical natural asset—and spearhead a new level of regional cooperation to make it more sustainable. As the ecological linchpin to the 31-state Mississippi River Basin, the River is responsible for creating \$400 billion worth of U.S. GDP; providing drinking water for more than 18 million; transporting 40 percent of our nation's agricultural output; delivering nearly 400 tons of coal and petroleum products; and directly supporting 1.3 million jobs and millions more indirectly.

Chris Coleman
MRCTI Co-Chair
Mayor of St. Paul, MN

Hiram Copeland
MRCTI Co-Chair
Mayor of Vidalia, LA

More information at www.mrcti.org or call MRCTI Executive Director Colin Wellenkamp at 314-657-3863.

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