Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative

For Immediate Release: March 19, 2020

Contact: Jim Gwinner, 314-791-2274, jgwinner@LS2group.com
Audio recording of the briefing will be available after 2 pm Central Time

Mississippi River Mayors Ready for Disaster Response During COVID-19 Pandemic

March 19, 2020, St. Louis, MO – Dozens of mayors of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) from all ten states gathered on a virtual 'situation room' – like call with federal agencies and partners to coordinate, organize, and elevate capacities around responding to the 2020 spring flood season while having to also address the COVID-19 pandemic.

We Will Respond

Mayors were quick to iterate that the capacity exists to respond to the pending spring storm impacts expected throughout the Mississippi River Corridor this spring. With the first sizable storm passing through the region this week, mayors have been working to gather additional capacity while as the same time limiting the spread of COVID-19.

"Our message to all our residents first and foremost is that we will respond to those in need of assistance from disaster impacts this spring," emphasized Sharon Weston Broome, Mayor of Baton Rouge and Co-Chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative. "We are working to manage a fight on two fronts – limiting contagion and addressing the effects of other disasters such as tornadoes, flooding, and storms."

"Our mayors have been in close communication and coordination with FEMA, the Corps of Engineers, NOAA, and USGS. The good news is all our federal partners are ready to deliver as much mission critical response as we would typically rely on even during this pandemic," assured Bob Gallagher, Mayor of Bettendorf, IA and Co-Chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative.

Keeping First Responders, Volunteers, and Residents Safe

All levels of government are mustering beyond traditional capabilities to manage contagion as well as other disturbances typical of this season. This requires instituting additional steps and protocols to keep personnel, volunteers, and residents safe from heightened risk of contagion while officials ready for, respond to, and recover from disasters expected through the region over the next couple of months.

"We are working closely with our state emergency management agencies, public health departments, FEMA, the Corps of Engineers, and the Red Cross to make sure our first responder teams have the personal protective gear they need and we can limit exposure to residents we interact with that may need assistance. Also, our smaller towns depend on volunteers for disaster response and thus we are developing protocols to limit contagion," said Mayor Rick Eberlin of Grafton, IL.

"The additional resources being made available to our states, the supplemental spending bill, and what our own states are doing to free-up resources for us are all helping," explained Mayor Sean Dowse of Red Wing, MN. "The Upper Mississippi River Valley has a heightened risk of flooding this year as does the lower River. So, we are particularly motivated to make certain our readiness can uphold both contagion control and disaster response."

Responding to Disasters is a Marathon not a Sprint

As mayors amplified on March 5 from Washington, DC the flood risk for the corridor is not as high this year as it was this time in 2019, but the likelihood of impacts remains and will be present until the summer following the usual pattern. Thus, mayors will work to keep their needs elevated on the national priority list.

"Here in some of the corridor's major metropolitan areas as well as our more rural surroundings, the need for additional resources for us to fight on both fronts is not likely to ebb soon so we have to keep pushing for what is needed on the ground," explained Mayor Belinda Constant of Gretna, LA. "Since 2019 presented us with months of flooding (longest in U.S. history) we've become better equipped to deal with events over a sustained time period."

# # #

Audio from this morning's press conference will be available after 2PM Central Time today, please contact Jim Gwinner at jgwinner@LS2group.com for that file.

Mayors attending the MRCTI press call and available for media inquiries:

- Hon. Bob Gallagher – City of Bettendorf, IA & MRCTI Co-Chair
- Hon. Sharon Weston Broome – City of Baton Rouge, LA & MRCTI Co-Chair
- Hon. Sean Dowse – City of Red Wing, MN
- Hon. Timothy Kabat – City of La Crosse, WI
- Hon. Mike Bawden – City of Riverdale, IA
- Hon. Rick Eberlin – City of Grafton, IL
- Hon. Phil Stang – City of Kimmswick, MO
- Hon. Kevin Smith – City of Helena-West Helena, AR
- Hon. George Flaggs, Jr. – City of Vicksburg, MS
- Hon. Belinda Constant – City of Gretna, LA

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) *is a coalition of 95 mayors from across the Mississippi River Corridor which spans along ten states from Minnesota to Louisiana. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. More than 40 percent of the nation's agricultural commodity output moves on the Mississippi River. The River's resources support 1.5 million jobs and create $496.7 billion in annual revenue.*