WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Tom Harkin (Iowa) and Roy Blunt (Mo.) announced the launch of the bipartisan Mississippi River Caucus today, an initiative to focus and collaborate congressional efforts on important river management goals such as flood mitigation, commerce along the Mississippi River, and to generally assist river communities with concerns.

“We learned a vital lesson this past fall when a potential disruption in navigation along the Mississippi threatened everything from increasing the cost to move goods to potential job losses. The river and its communities play an important role in commerce and the local economy,” said Harkin. “The Mississippi River Caucus will look at ways that the Congress can be helpful to the cities and towns along the River to improve their economies and their quality of life, and to better respond to floods and other threats. I am pleased to work with Senator Blunt in this effort and I look forward to the work ahead.”

“The Mississippi River is a vital artery of commerce for hundreds of millions of tons of agriculture goods and other products that are important to our national economy,” said Blunt. “We must work to maintain the river channel, which has a critical impact on jobs, income to many businesses and farmers, and the economy of the region as a whole. This bipartisan caucus will provide a platform to bring together those states along the Mississippi River so that we can encourage navigation, promote commerce, and prevent destructive floods.”

The 2012 droughts leading to dangerously low-water levels on the Mississippi River showed the need for states along the river to work together. The Mississippi River Caucus will provide an open forum for the various issues that affect the entire reach of the Mississippi River, like aging infrastructure.

In November 2012, Harkin and Blunt worked to bring together a bipartisan group of Senators to urge the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to immediately address water levels and ask President Obama to issue an emergency directive to support response efforts.

The Mississippi River has the third largest drainage basin in the world, and stretches approximately 2,350 miles from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. It is a thriving economic thoroughfare in the United States with hundreds of billions of tons of cargo being transported up and down the river each year, including grain and other agriculture products, coal, iron, steel, and petroleum products.

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