DORIS O. MATSUI
5TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
AND COMMERCE

# Congress of the United States
## House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–0505

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
222 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515–0505
(202) 225–7163

DISTRICT OFFICE:
ROBERT T. MATSUI U.S. COURTHOUSE
501 I STREET, SUITE 12–600
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
(916) 498–5600

http://matsui.house.gov

May 13, 2011

The Honorable John L. Mica
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall, II
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mica and Ranking Member Rahall:

I am writing to respectfully request that the Natomas Levee Project, recommended by the Chief of Engineers on December 30, 2010, be included in the next Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) and that you move this vital legislation this year.

The flooding in the South and Midwest is a pressing reminder of the destructive force of Mother Nature and the economic consequences that she can have. It also is a reminder that properly planned, maintained and operated flood protection systems can save countless lives and property and prevent having to spend billions of dollars in Federal disaster relief.

There should be no argument that aging levees place too much of our public at risk. The American Society of Civil Engineers recently graded our nation's levees as a D-. Hurricane Katrina caused $16 billion in damages, the 2008 Midwest floods caused over $500 million and it is still unclear how much economic damaged resulted from this spring's floods. Improvements to our nation's levees and other flood protection infrastructure is necessary.

The widespread destruction to agricultural centers and established towns should force Congress to move forward with a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) to ensure future floods do not disrupt economic activity and harm the public's safety. It has been almost four years since the last WRDA passed Congress. Since then, a number of key infrastructure investments have been carefully studied by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with a keen eye towards both public safety and national economic justification.

One such project that has been thoroughly studied by the Corps of Engineers is the Natomas Basin component off the American River Watershed (Common Features) project in Sacramento, California. Levee deficiencies were found in the area in 2006 and

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it was remapped by FEMA in 2008. The Corps of Engineers has said the area has a level of flood protection of below 1 in 33 years, a third of the minimum national standard of 1 in 100 years. The area to be protected by the project is home to over 100,000 people, two interstate highways and an international airport. It is heavily urbanized and home to dozens of schools and hundreds of small businesses. If a levee broke the damage would be similar to New Orleans. The Corps of Engineers has developed a levee improvement plan that would reduce 96 percent of expected flood damages, return an average of $502 million in annual economic benefits and has a benefit to cost ration of 6 to 1.

Local residents have voted to tax themselves to pay for the improvements. In the absence of timely federal participation in construction, the State of California and Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency have already begun construction and will have spent upwards of $350 million on the project by the end of this year. On January 26, 2011, I re-introduced legislation (H.R. 433) that would authorize Federal funding for the Natomas levee project. It is my highest priority and I will continue to seek every and all avenues to pass this legislation. It is clear that this and other projects like it, can only be completed if Congress acts to authorize the Corps to proceed.

This spring's flooding shows us that the federal government must take its responsibility of upgrading our nation's levees seriously. I am confident that by working together we can resolve any concerns over authorizing specific projects and do so in a manner that is transparent, affordable, and responsible. We can improve our economy and protect lives and property by moving forward on a WRDA without delay. Failing to act will leave millions of Americans without the flood protection they deserve and only result in greater damage to our nation's economy.

I also plan to distribute a Dear Colleague letter to House Members on the urgent need for a WRDA bill this year.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and for any assistance you may provide.

Sincerely,

Doris Matsui

DORIS O. MATSUI
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Norm Dicks, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee