

Declare national emergency to recover from flood

by Marcia Merry

Because of the persisting rainfall in the upper Midwest throughout July, the devastation from flooding and water-logged land in the Mississippi-Missouri upper watersheds continues to mount by the hour. A typical example: On July 17, the Baraboo River in Sauk County, Wisconsin rose by 10 feet in five hours during a storm lasting over two days, during which fully 7.78 inches of rain fell during one three-hour stretch.

Even before the time when things finally “dry out,” and a full damage assessment can be made, it is clear that restoring this area to productive habitation will require much more than heroic relief efforts; it requires declaring and acting on a *nationwide* economic emergency. As of now, the decrepit U.S. economy simply does not have the output potential to produce the physical goods needed to rebuild and improve the water resources system of the country.

In mid-July, James Lee Witt, head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), stressed the vast infrastructural damage to public works, when he made a visit to the town of Black River Falls on Wisconsin's Black River. He said, “They found 5,000 feet of their sewer system had collapsed from the flood waters. I'm just telling you we're going to have a lot of infrastructural damage. Roads have been under water for weeks and their bases are soft. Electrical wiring and electrical systems have been ruined. It's very early in this disaster.”

Billions of dollars in damage have been done to bridges, sewer lines, ports and storage facilities, locks and dams. Thousands of tons of finished goods are needed—pipes, valves, motors, electrical wiring, construction material, fixtures, and also huge amounts of rock, gravel, sand and other raw commodities. Yet the U.S. economy has been *shutting down* capacity right and left while government leaders prate foolishly about the “unique growth” phase we are experiencing—“the economy is growing, but there are no jobs.” How

can these bills of materials for infrastructure be supplied?

Some say they shouldn't be supplied. The three most foolish approaches you hear and see most often from government, media, and many of your own non-think neighbors are:

1) There's no money, so don't rebuild. That is what budget director Leon Panetta said on July 16 in response to requests from the the Chicago Midwest Governors' conference, where lawmakers called for cash grants, not relief aid. The same line oozes from London financial circles, where the July 17 *Economist* wrote, “Everyone agrees that there is no point in building more or bigger flood-control systems, and, these days, there is no money for them.”

2) There is the appealing notion that, somehow, if we all just pitch in, shoulder to shoulder, and send bottled water, buckets, and bandages, things will all turn out okay. “Somebody, somewhere, will take care of things.”

3) Finally, there is the *New York Times*-led line that waterworks and flood control were bad from the start, since they violated the river's sacred rights to flood; therefore, not even one new levee should be built.

The last idea may be the most immoral, but all these approaches are hopeless:

● *Money*. No matter how much Panetta and Congress try to cut spending and save money, there will be no budget balancing if there is no economy and no tax base. The rebuilding requirements for the Mississippi-Missouri upper basins dramatically illustrate how tackling the needed refurbishing and infrastructure improvements all around the country can provide that economic tax base. Millions of jobs, and billions in taxable income would ensue. In contrast, *not* undertaking rebuilding will just crash what's left of the economy even more quickly.

● *Mother Earth*. The anti-levee lobby led by *New York Times* opposes human civilization on principle. A July 18

Times feature on the floods ran a full-width photo of Iowa farmland under water, with the headline, "The Mississippi Reclaims Its True Domain."

● *Just send relief.* Thousands of people are tirelessly pitching in to aid flood-stricken areas, and millions of people are sending contributions. That's fine for emergency measures and small repairs, but it won't rebuild destroyed sewers, roads, bridges, locks, and dams.

To deter anyone from mobilizing for a full-scale infrastructure development approach, the establishment powers have deployed Hollywood, the major media, and "approved alternative politicians" such as Ross Perot. On July 19, Perot visited the Salvation Army center in Alton, Ill., met briefly with Mayor Bob Towse, and told the media, "These are strong people. They'll be here when the water goes down. There's no question about that. . . . I'm here today at the request of all the members of United We Stand America. All of our members and volunteers along the river have volunteered to help the people who have problems." He said nothing about a battle plan for reconstruction. Likewise, John Mellancamp, a performer sidekick of Willie Nelson, the figurehead for FarmAid, staged a benefit concert in Chicago, for "FloodAid."

Meanwhile, the media are either churning out mind-numbing "human interest" flood stories, or, in the case of ABC's "Good Morning America," are fomenting racial hatred. "Why aren't blacks seen out on the lines sandbagging at the levees?" ABC's Diane Richardson provocatively asked the anchor of a local radio station in Des Moines, Iowa. "Many people are coming to the belief that the black community shouldn't be allowed to get any water or any help, since they don't see black faces on TV at the levees helping. Why are blacks sitting back?"

Vast infrastructure breakdown

The area covered by either floods or waterlogged land extends to large portions of 222 counties in six states—Iowa (all 99 counties are official disaster zones), South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Illinois, along with significant areas in adjacent states, including Nebraska and Kansas.

Apart from flooded homes, crops, factories, stores, schools, and government buildings, think for a moment about the ruination under way of essential public infrastructure—power, water, transport and health.

● *Roads.* The Army Corps of Engineers is keeping lists of key transport routes knocked out, and the list runs for more than four pages for the state of Missouri alone. As of July 22, Interstate 80 between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City was still closed, but a section between Iowa City and Des Moines re-opened. Drying out does not necessarily restore the road for use. Roadbed slippage and slumping typically knock out travel, especially on older rural roads, built before soil mechanics were understood. The modern interstates will fare better, but they

must dry out first, and problems arise at the bridges.

● *Bridges.* Hundreds of bridges have been knocked out. At one point, there was no crossing over the Mississippi for close to 300 miles on the western Illinois shore, because 14 bridges were out. Since then, the Keokuk bridge has been restored. These bridges will all have varying damage. The Mississippi-Missouri has 141 tributaries, dozens located in the rainfall zone, with hundreds of bridges now unusable or unsafe.

● *Rail.* The Mississippi-Missouri system bifurcates the heartland of the United States, and the main east-west rail lines cut run through the flood zone, and the north-south rail lines frequently follow the river valleys. These are all in various states of damage.

● *Power.* Many power plants are located along the rivers or at rail points, and they rely on the flow of coal—much of which comes by waterway down the Ohio River from the coal-rich Appalachians, or by rail from the sulfur coal deposits in the west. These power stations typically have at least a three-month lead, but the waterway travel will be disrupted at least that long.

Critical parts of entire electric distribution systems are damaged: power lines, transformers, and other installations. For example, a 62-mile length of 325 transmission lines which supply 60% of the power in Lincoln, Neb. was brought down by 100 mph winds and thunderstorms. Utilities are now buying from low-voltage lines. This was a major link in power grid which must be rebuilt, but they say this cannot occur until next year.

● *Waterway installations.* The famous "stairway" of 27 locks and dams that runs from Minneapolis down to St. Louis will need refurbishing from water and debris damage, as will various port facilities all along the river.

● *Sanitation.* Scores of towns have lost use of their central water treatment and/or sewage treatment facilities. The most famous is Des Moines, where 250,000 residents had saw their 800-mile city water pipe system dry up, when floods overran the central treatment plant. The sewage treatment plant in Cedar Rapids also shut down.

Stop the insanity

Rebuilding from the flood will require an about-face in current thinking in Washington. In an interview with *EIR* on July 21, former presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche stressed that there will be no economic recovery—from the flood or from anything else—until the budget-cutting mania in Washington is halted and his proposal for national credit-creation through a new national bank is implemented. "The attempt to balance the budget *will make things worse, not better.* If you want to balance the budget, do it the way I proposed during the recent election campaign. . . . But if we do it [Federal Reserve Chairman Alan] Greenspan's way, that is like going into a closet, putting a gun not to your head, but to your belly—an automatic pistol, perhaps an Uzi—and setting it off, and dying a slow and painful death as a nation."