

PRESS
RELEASE

DICK DURBIN
US SENATOR FOR ILLINOIS
ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER



For Immediate Release

Contact: Christina Angarola

(312) 353-4623 office

(312) 848-4484 cell

Christina_Angarola@durbin.senate.gov

December 10, 2012

DURBIN: CONGRESS NEEDS TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT ADDRESSING CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF EXTREME WEATHER

[CHICAGO] – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today called on Congress to “face facts and acknowledge the obvious: weather is getting worse.” Durbin said the economic impact of severe weather events is projected to grow in future years as their frequency and intensity continues to rise. As a consequence, federal, state and local governments will pay out more and more each year in damages. Speaking from the Lake Michigan shoreline, Durbin pointed to the ongoing drought and resulting low water levels in the lake and Illinois’ rivers as a local example of severe weather impacting industry and burdening taxpayers.

“It is the job of Congress and the Administration to help Americans in their time of need -- we should, and we will, do so -- but we need to be honest about how we plan for disaster spending. Last year, as severe weather events took a greater toll, I held a hearing to examine whether or not the federal government is ready for this to be the new normal. The answer is no,” Durbin said.

In the wake of this summer’s drought – which may cost the federal government as much as \$12 billion in aid to farmers and ranchers – over 90 percent of Illinois land is still considered “abnormally dry.” Lake Michigan’s water level is 28 inches below the long-term average. The Mississippi River is also nearing historic low-water levels, raising concerns among shippers and the industries that rely on them that barges will soon be unable to navigate between St. Louis and Cairo, Ill. As a critical transportation artery for essential commodities, the financial impact of the Mississippi’s shutdown would be far-reaching.

According to a report by the Government Accountability Office in September, there have been over 540 disaster declarations in the last eight years requiring over \$90 billion in federal aid. That number will soon increase substantially: just last week, President Barack Obama’s administration requested \$60 billion in aid to help victims of Hurricane Sandy on the East Coast.

-- more --

“We need to re-think how we protect federal assets and provide disaster assistance to communities on a more regular basis. The insurance and defense sectors have looked at the scientific data and they are changing their operations, preparing for worse weather and bigger losses. As the ultimate insurer of millions of Americans in the Crop Insurance and National Flood Insurance Programs, the federal government needs to get serious about addressing the causes and effects of climate change,” Durbin said.

“While the cause of a single weather event cannot be traced to climate change, extreme weather events do serve as wake-up calls that an environmental crisis of global proportions is occurring. Congress can no longer afford to ignore this issue. We ought to face the reality of greenhouse gas emissions and create energy and environmental policies to reduce their destructive impact. We need to invest in renewable energy and pollution controls to help slow the effects of climate change and protect our public health,” Durbin said.

The 2012 drought is only the most recent example of extreme weather hitting Illinois. In 2011, the state saw record blizzards, rainfall and flooding as a result of severe weather events. In February, Chicago was shut down as two feet of snow and 60 mile-per-hour winds hammered the city and stranded 1500 people on Lake Shore Drive. Two months later, the Midwest saw its wettest April in 116 years, causing thousands of miles of flooding along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Together, those two events alone killed 43 people and caused up to \$11 billion in damages. Other areas of the country have fared no better. In total, the Federal Emergency Management Agency declared 97 major weather disasters in 2011 – a new record.

-30-



Speaking from the 12th Street Beach along Lake Michigan in Chicago on December 10, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin discussed how the ongoing drought and resulting low water levels in the Lake and rivers impact industry and burden taxpayers. Senator Durbin was joined by (L-R) Lieutenant Colonel James Schreiner, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Executive Director David St. Pierre, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, and Director of Lakefront Operations Cathy Hudzik, Chicago Park District.