The Honorable R.D. James  
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)  
108 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310

The Honorable Russell Vought  
Acting Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

January 24, 2020

Dear Assistant Secretary James and Acting Director Vought:

As you continue work on the President’s Budget for Fiscal Year 2021, I ask that your request include dredging funds for Lake Providence Harbor, LA. Lake Providence is the largest inland waterway port in Louisiana and among the top 20 inland ports in the U.S. in terms of tonnage. Every year the Port moves roughly 1 million tons of farm commodities worth hundreds of millions of dollars from our nation’s breadbasket. These products are shipped down the Mississippi River to the Port of New Orleans, where they reach markets around the world.

Lake Providence Port experiences annual problems with sediment deposits that enter the harbor channel from the Mississippi River and require dredging by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. These sediment deposits lower the allowable draft and force barges to light load grain, and at worst, can shut down operations at the Port altogether if a barge runs aground or if a dredge must operate during the middle of the harvest. These delays significantly increase storage and shipping costs for our farmers and have led to millions of dollars in losses to the farm economy in northeast Louisiana and southeast Arkansas.

Lake Providence usually receives nominal funding in the President’s Budget for the Corps to conduct surveys to determine if dredging is required. However, because of the nature of the River and the sediment deposits, dredging funds are inevitably needed every year, and the account must be backfilled with either Corps Work Plan or emergency funds. This haphazard way of funding the project makes it difficult for the Corps to secure a dredging contract in a timely manner, which leads to the light-loading and delays previously mentioned. FY 2019 was the first time that dredging funds were included in the President’s Budget request ($1.315 million), and the first year in many that the Port was not hobbled by shipping delays due to dredging.

Despite this progress, no funds were requested for dredging in the FY 2020 Budget. To avoid these problems in FY 2021, I ask that you request adequate dredging funds in the President’s Budget for FY 2021, so that Congress can appropriate funds for the project without violating the Congressional earmark ban. Our farmers continue to face depressed prices and market pressures due to unfair and illegal Chinese trade practices. Your attention to this matter will ensure that
many of our farmers can access available markets without unnecessary delay. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Ralph Abraham, M.D.
Member of Congress