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ARMED SERVICES

SMALL BUSINESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4702

July 11, 2008

Steve Barger, President
Associated General Contractors of Washington
410 11th Ave SE, Suite 203
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Steve:

Knowing of the Associated General Contractors of Washington's interest in Skagit River flood control efforts, I wanted to update you as to my efforts in Congress in regards to the Skagit River General Investigation study, flood control projects and FEMA's current flood mapping of Skagit County.

The Skagit River is vital to the communities of the Skagit Valley. Over the years, repeated Skagit River floods have negatively impacted the lives and livelihoods of the residents, farms and businesses of the Skagit Valley. These floods have cost the federal government tens of millions of dollars in recovery aid and emergency management.

Skagit County, in partnership with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is currently performing a General Investigation study to identify Skagit River flood problems and opportunities that exist to relieve flooding, reduce flood damage, and develop a flood reduction plan. I strongly support completion of the Skagit River GI study. To date, the Washington state congressional delegation has secured nearly \$5 million in federal funding to continue the GI study. The current version of the House Fiscal Year 2009 Energy and Water Appropriations bill contains \$250,000 for the Skagit River GI.

The Skagit River GI study will evaluate a wide range of flood damage reduction solutions to develop an array of flood protection projects that provide the most benefits at the least cost, with minimal environmental impact and safe construction. The GI study does not focus on one particular flood protection solution, but rather looks for the best possible solutions for the least cost. Increasing flood storage capacity at the Baker Dam is one of the solutions the Corps of Engineers is examining as part of the GI study.

I am committed to providing federal assistance for flood protection solutions initiated prior to the completion of the GI, that are part of a system-wide approach and in-line with the current GI findings. One such project is Skagit County's Skagit River Bridge Modification and Interstate Highway Protection Project. This project consists of levee setbacks within Dike Districts 12, 17, and 20 that will help protect vital infrastructure such as Interstate 5, the Burlington Boulevard (Highway 99), and BNSF trestle crossings

from flooding. Since 2005, I have helped secure over \$3.8 million in federal funding for the Skagit River Bridge Modification and Interstate Highway Protection Project.

Finally, FEMA is undertaking a nationwide effort to update flood maps across the country, and FEMA is currently undergoing this process in Skagit County. I believe that local community participation is an important part of the flood mapping process. In the fall of 2007, it came to my attention that local government and business organizations in Skagit County planned to request that FEMA agree to a proposal for an independent, scientific panel to evaluate and identify the most technically and scientifically accurate hydrograph for use by FEMA and the community of Skagit County. This panel was intended to occur before the preliminary maps are released in order to bring finality to the review process, and in a way that would allow a thorough and independent consideration of all scientific data. On January 7, 2008, I sent a letter to FEMA Regional Director Susan Reinertson encouraging her agency to consider this proposal from the Skagit partnership. After meetings between FEMA and the Skagit partnership, FEMA ultimately concluded that the Skagit partnership's proposal to convene an independent panel prior to the release of the preliminary maps would violate public process and go against federal regulations. I continue to encourage FEMA to involve the Skagit community in their flood mapping process.

I share your concern that both the Skagit River General Investigation study and the FEMA flood mapping are completed in a timely and fair fashion so the county and cities can move forward with necessary life-saving flood control projects. I am actively working with the Skagit community, the Washington state congressional delegation, the Corps of Engineers, and FEMA to ensure that these important goals are reached.

I hope this information is useful to you. If you have any additional questions please don't hesitate to contact me or Betsy Robblee of my staff at (202) 225-2605.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
United States Representative
Washington State, 2nd District