

Second District Congressman Markwayne Mullin is sounding an oft-repeated battle cry â€” the critical need for maintenance along the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigational System. He said when he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2012, the "critical backlog need" along MKARNS was \$68 million. Now, that number is close to \$300 million, he said. "The critical backlog means that there is a 50-50 chance at any time that one of those critical needs can fail and shut down the navigational channel," Mullin said this week by phone. "We're not talking about a nut being loose. We're talking about critical." The Tulsa Port of Catoosa and Port of Muskogee are among the facilities along the 445-mile McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System, which contains 18 locks and dams and runs from the port to the Mississippi River. Operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, it supports economic activity across a 12-state region, supporting 55,000 jobs. "The navigational channel has a \$3 million-and-growing-per-day economic impact on Oklahoma," Mullin said. "It is extremely vital to our (agriculture) community. In the winter months, it's the farthest inland water port that's open 365 days a year. From Oklahoma up, all our northern states, they rely on us to get ag product in and out of their state, and that's including equipment and construction equipment, like rebar." Mullin and the Oklahoma delegation in Washington, D.C., are seeking federal money for the Corps to repair locks and dams and to make improvements such as deepening the channel to increase barge payloads. "The central part of the United States relies on our navigational channel," he said. "If we continue to neglect it, we're going to lose, one, the huge economic impact it has and also the competitiveness to get our products from point A to B in an efficient manner. If we have to ship it by rail or ship it by truck, the cost of our goods go up and we can't be competitive by that point." Mullin isn't bullish about getting those financial MKARNS needs met immediately. "I'm not very optimistic on where we're at right now," he said. "Those in charge, which are not Republicans, they

are not really paying attention to it. "â€! This year, I don't see it happening, not on the House side, for sure. Maybe (U.S. Sen. Jim) Inhofe can get it done on the Senate side because I know he is pushing hard."

The 50th anniversary of then-President Richard Nixonâ€™s dedication of the inland commercial navigation system was celebrated in June. The system was named after U.S. Sens. John L. McClellan of Arkansas and Robert S. Kerr of Oklahoma, visionaries for the project, which was undertaken as a way to mitigate flooding and create economic opportunities. MKARNS, which moves everything from chemical fertilizer to agricultural products to iron and steel, allows companies to transport millions of tons of bulk freight by barge each year at a fraction of the cost and environmental impact of rail or truck. Featured video: [Subscribe to Daily Headlines](#) Sign up! \* I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy. The business news you need Get the latest local business news delivered FREE to your inbox weekly. Sign up! \* I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy.