

Congressman Keith Ellison
Statement before the House Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee
Hearing on Structurally Deficient Bridges
September 5, 2007

Let me start by thanking Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica for holding this important and timely hearing on structurally deficient bridges.

I want to recognize Mayor R.T. Rybak for his tremendous leadership during this bridge collapse crisis. Mayor Rybak and his fellow elected county and state officials made Minnesota and our nation proud with their strong and steady leadership during this calamity. I also want to thank Governor Pawlenty, Transportation Secretary Peters and the NTSB for all their work

Lastly, let me also publicly thank the heroic efforts of the first responders – firefighters, police officers and emergency medical personnel - whose heroism in the first minutes and hours after the bridge collapse saved countless lives.

As you all may know, the tragic collapse of the Interstate 35W Bridge occurred in the Fifth Congressional District of Minnesota, my district. It has been widely reported that Interstate 35W Bridge was “structurally deficient.” And in fact, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, one of every eight bridges across the nation is “structurally deficient.” In my home state of Minnesota, about ten percent of the 13,000 bridges in the state were recently rated as “deficient.”

So the problem of structurally deficient bridges is not a theoretical issue for us or anyone in America. It is a very real issue that demands our attention today so that other communities across the nation can be spared the grief that my district and my state had to

bear on August 1, 2007 when the Interstate 35W Bridge collapsed. We lost 13 Minnesotans. These individuals were mothers, fathers, children, workers, good people, each and all.

Let me conclude by respectfully asking this Congress to regard this tragedy as a national call to action to focus on our domestic infrastructure.

On August 1st, we as a nation were united in the grief for the victims and later were united in the recovery and healing efforts. Now, let us be united in rebuilding our nation's ailing public infrastructure. For if the nation is a body, our infrastructure is the skeleton holds it up.

I look forward to working with this committee and other Members of Congress to making a new national commitment to the public infrastructure of this country.