

**Testimony of
Senator Amy Klobuchar**
*Oversight Hearing to Examine the Condition of our Nation's Bridges
Before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee*

Thank you Chairman Boxer for holding this important hearing;

The horrific collapse of the I-35W Bridge has provoked concern among all Americans—not just Minnesotans—that the bridges they drive across each day just may not be safe.

As I said the day after the bridge collapse: In America, a bridge should not fall down. Especially not an eight-lane interstate highway.....Especially not one of the most heavily traveled bridges in the state.... Especially not at rush hour in the heart of a major metropolitan area.

But the I-35W Bridge in Minneapolis did fall down on August 1.

I can't even begin to count how many times that my husband, my daughter, and I drove across the I-35W Bridge.

That bridge was not just in my backyard; it was actually in my front yard. It was only eight blocks away from my front door. It was one of the most heavily traveled bridges in our State; an estimated 140,000 vehicles crossed that bridge every day, and our state's economy loses an estimated \$400,000 in revenue each day the bridge cannot be used.

When I watched what unfolded that night, I was shocked and horrified. But on that evening and in the days that followed, the whole world watched as our state came together. I was proud to be a Minnesotan.

We saw true heroes in the face of unimaginable circumstances.

We saw off-duty Minneapolis firefighter Shanna Hanson, who grabbed her life jacket and was among the first at the scene. Tethered to a yellow life rope, in the midst of broken concrete and tangled rebar, she swam from car to car searching for survivors.

We saw that school bus perched precariously on the fallen bridge deck. I call it the Miracle Bus. Inside were dozens of kids from a very poor neighborhood who had been on a swimming field trip. Their bus was crossing the bridge when it dropped. Thanks to the quick action of responsible adults and the kids themselves, they all survived.

Now, with the perspective of a few weeks' time, what can we begin to take away from this catastrophe?

First, we must get to the bottom of why this enormous bridge suddenly fell down into the Mississippi River.

It didn't happen because of an earthquake or a barge collision. Something went terribly wrong and we need to get answers.

Past inspection reports show that the bridge's condition had been a subject of growing concern for many years. This wasn't a bridge over troubled waters; it was a troubled bridge over the water.

Still, as a former prosecutor, I know we must wait until all the facts and evidence are in before we reach a verdict. We will need to be patient as the investigation continues. It will take time, but we need to know.

Second, the emergency response to the bridge collapse demonstrated an impressive level of preparedness that should be a model for the nation.

You can never feel good about a tragedy like this. But I feel good about our police officers, firefighters, paramedics and other first responders.

As Hennepin County Attorney for eight years, I remember meeting with the sheriff, police chief and other officials as we planned and practiced disaster preparedness drills. We learned the lessons from 9/11.

Even though no one ever imagined a major bridge would collapse, the results of all that planning and preparation were evident on the night of August 1. It saved lives.

Third, we need to move ahead to build a new, safe bridge.

Although the recovery and rebuilding efforts have only just begun, fast action in Washington has already helped pave the way.

In just three days, Senator Coleman and I worked together in the Senate to secure \$250 million in emergency bridge reconstruction funding. Representative Jim Oberstar led the way in the House.

Approval of this funding came with remarkable speed and bipartisanship. Capitol Hill veterans tell me it was a rare feat, aided by the unity among Minnesota's elected leaders across the political spectrum.

Finally, America needs to come to grips with broader questions about our deteriorating infrastructure.

Although we do not yet know the exact causes for the I-35W bridge collapse, this disaster has shocked Americans into a realization of how important it is to invest in safe, sound infrastructure.

Unfortunately, it has taken a disaster to put the issue of infrastructure investment squarely on the national agenda. We must take steps to make sure no other bridge falls down like this, in

Minnesota or anywhere else in our nation.

But sadly, it did collapse. It wasn't sturdy enough to hold: Sherry Engebretsen, Artemio Trinidad-Mena, Julia Blackhawk, Patrick Holmes, Peter Hausmann, Greg Jolstad, Scott Sathers, Christina Sacorafas, Sady and Hanah Sahal, or Vera Peck and Richard Chit the 13 people who lost their lives or any of the other 123 people injured, when the bridge collapsed.

It was an unforgettable tragedy; but it was not unimaginable.

The tragic collapse of the I-35W Bridge was caused by our neglect, and future collapses will only be prevented by our diligence.

So on behalf of all Minnesotan's—I thank Senator Boxer for holding this hearing. I look forward to working with you, and all of my EPW colleagues as we move forward to strengthen our national infrastructure—and prevent another tragic event from happening.

I would also like to thank Secretary Peters for her efforts in the immediate aftermath of the bridge collapse. The early relief the Department provided helped Minnesota:

- increase transit options to serve commuters;
- set up detours to restore traffic flow;
- clear structural debris; and
- begin to lay the general groundwork for rebuilding.

And with the money that we appropriated last week with the Klobuchar-Coleman Amendment to the Transportation Bill, Minnesota now has the initial funds to begin the rebuilding process.

When the new bridge is completed, I know it will serve as a model of structural integrity and engineering for years to come.

A critical investment in maintenance and major reconstruction of our nation's transportation infrastructure—especially our bridges—is needed.

As this map shows, of the almost 600,000 bridges listed in the National Bridge Inventory roughly, 12% are classified as structurally deficient. That is almost 74,000 bridges.

- Total Bridges in U.S.: *Almost 600,000.*
- Structurally Deficient Bridges: *73,784*
- Estimated Cost to fix all Bridges: *\$65 Billion*

What does "structurally deficient" mean?

When inspectors evaluate a bridge they examine the bridges deck, superstructure, and substructure. Each of these components are ranked on a scale of 0 to 9, with 0 being "failed" and 9 being "excellent." If the deck, superstructure, or substructure is given a 4 or less, the bridge is classified as "structurally deficient".

As my colleagues can see, a rating of 4 or less includes corrosion or movement of key support beams, or advanced cracking and deterioration in the bridges foundation.

In June of 2006, the I-35W Bridge's superstructure -- meaning the physical conditions of all structural members -- was rated at a 4. The bridge's deck was rated 5, and the substructure, comprised of the piers, abutments, footings and other components, was rated a 6.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation was in the process of completing their 2007 inspection when the Bridge collapsed.

As today's panelist will be able to tell us—there are plenty of bridges throughout the country with worst inspection records than the I-35W Bridge.

When almost 12% of all American bridges are in need of serious repair—it is time to act.

When the Highway Trust Fund is projected to go into deficit in FY09—there is a serious funding problem.

When we are building new bridges, and not properly maintaining the ones we already have, there is a problem with our priorities.

And when the American people question the integrity of the bridges they cross each and every day—it is a national embarrassment.

Put all of this together, it is a call for action.

It underlines the fact that my colleagues and I on this Committee—which has been entrusted with the responsibility of building and maintaining our infrastructure—have a lot of work ahead of us.

With that in mind, I look forward to hearing from the panelists and working with my EPW colleagues to get this work done; so that we ensure our national transportation system has the confidence of the American people, as well as being the envy of the rest of world.

Thank you Madame Chairman.