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ELLEN O'NAN | The Sun

The long-awaited completion of the Olmsted Locks and Dam was celebrated Thursday in a dedication ceremony. Olmsted will replace Locks and Dams 52 and 53 on the Ohio River and is expected to reduce locking times from five hours to one hour.

**Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell** speaks at the dedication of the Olmsted Locks and Dam on Thursday morning. He called the project's completion a huge moment in the history of the American waterways system, which "helped the country grow, barge by barge, ton by ton, year by year."

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## Officials applaud completion of \$3 billion Olmsted project

BY DAVID ZOELLER

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**OLMSTED, III** — A day 30 years in the making came to pass Thursday as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, its contractors, river industry partners and elected officials dedicated the opening of the Olmsted Locks and Dam.

The roughly \$3 billion project is the nation's largest inland navigation civil works accomplishment. It will replace the 90-year-old Locks and Dams 52 and 53, located at Brookport and Grand Chain, and should significantly increase traffic on the lower Ohio River, particularly in

and around Paducah.

"We're gathered here today because of dreamers and doers, empowered by science and engineering," said Lt. Gen. Todd Semonite, commanding general of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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# OLMSTED

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Olmsted stands as a shining example of the Corps' effort to overcome challenges and deliver a project that will positively impact lives for generations to come, he said.

Olmsted is scheduled to be fully operational by October. According to the Corps, lessons learned over the course of the project and continued funding have resulted in its completion four years ahead of schedule at a cost savings of approximately \$325 million.

"Today was a very long time in the making," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky. "Getting this project across the finish line required our communities to marshal everything we had: countless hours of hard, physical labor, feats of engineering, the political will to keep our eyes on the prize and bipartisan collaboration across multiple levels of government.

"In short, my friends, it took American imagination to conceive of this project ... and American persistence to see it through."

McConnell, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and Energy and Water

Development Subcommittee that funds inland waterways projects, noted the importance of Olmsted to the commonwealth.

"The inland waterways support over 10,000 jobs in Kentucky, so obviously it was my duty to fight for every inch, for every dollar appropriated, for every bit of public support, and I was proud to work to develop legislation that finally sped up the completion of the project."

First District U.S. Rep. James Comer noted "our inland waterways are a critical piece of what makes our country great, and the opening of Olmsted Locks and Dam is a huge step forward in modernizing this vital system and ensuring that our nation's river infrastructure will remain the envy of the world."

According to Comer, some 90 million tons of cargo move through the area each year, including agriculture-related commodities, coal, building materials and much more.

"This is great news for western Kentucky, home of the hub of the inland waterways system ... Paducah," he said.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, pointed out the Olmsted project has

benefited the states on both sides of the Ohio River.

"I've listened carefully to the earlier speakers talk about the contributions of Kentucky to the project, now I'd like to say a word about Illinois," he said, smiling.

He noted several other Illinois lawmakers who supported the project over its 30 years, and the thousands of "quality jobs, with quality pay" Olmsted provided to the state's workforce.

While the Olmsted project "is one of the nation's most expensive civil works projects in our history, I think we'll understand quickly the money was well spent for America's taxpayers," Durbin said.

"The Corps estimates that each year we'll see \$640 million in net benefit from the new locks and dam. They estimate the project will pay for itself in just five years," he said.

"It's a tribute to the men and women of the Army Corps of Engineers and all those who worked on the project."

He also praised the bipartisan effort with support from both sides of the political aisle.

"As I reflect on it, I think it's just what America is asking all of us to do more of."