

OPENING REMARKS

Energy & Water Subcommittee Hearing – Feb. 11 2015

Budget Hearing: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today, and also Senator Feinstein, who I will be working with on the appropriations bill that this subcommittee considers.

Our witnesses today include:

Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works

Lieutenant General Thomas P. Bostick, Chief of Engineers for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Estevan López, Commissioner for the Bureau of Reclamation

Jennifer Gimbel, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science for the Department of Interior

This is my first budget hearing as chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy & Water Development.

Governing is about setting priorities, and unfortunately, the president's budget request for these agencies shows a failure to do so.

The president's overall budget proposes spending that exceeds the budget caps established by the Budget Control Act of 2011 by about \$74 billion. One of the priorities he speaks about often is our nation's infrastructure.

Yet despite all that proposed new spending and all that talk, this proposal cuts the Corps' budget by \$751 million, or about 14 percent below last year's actual spending level. This budget proposes cutting the Corps' funding to the actual level of spending in 2007 – we are literally moving backward, on an agency that is crucial to maintaining our country's infrastructure.

The reason this is such a problem is that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers touches the lives of all Americans. The Corps maintains our inland waterways, keeps our ports open, looks after many of our recreational waters and land, manages the river levels to prevent flooding, and its dams provide emission-free, renewable hydroelectric energy.

All of these activities attract the intense interest of the American people, and of their United States senators. I can recall when, after the flooding of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers four years ago, eight senators showed up at a Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing to discuss what went right and what went wrong with disaster relief efforts.

The reality is that for all the Corps does there are many things it could do better, and setting priorities in our spending is one way to better invest taxpayer dollars.

An important example of the administration's failure to set priorities is in my home state of Tennessee: the lack of any funds in the president's budget request to restart replacement of Chickamauga Lock. Congress has done its job to move ahead promptly on replacing Chickamauga Lock, and it's disappointing the Obama administration has failed to do its job.

First, Congress passed a law that reduced the amount of money that comes from the Inland Waterways Trust Fund to replace Olmsted Lock, a project in Illinois and Kentucky that was soaking up almost all of the money that is available for inland waterway projects. Second, we worked with the commercial waterways industry to establish a priority list for projects that needed to be funded, on which Chickamauga ranks near the top, in fourth place. And third, just this past year we enacted a user fee increase that commercial barge owners asked to pay in order to provide additional funds to replace locks and dams across the country, including Chickamauga Lock.

Those three things taken together should make it possible for the Corps of Engineers to move rapidly to begin to replace Chickamauga Lock. The problem with Chickamauga Lock is it's made of aging concrete and could fail if we don't replace it. In fact, in October of last year, the lock was closed for several days to all navigation traffic for emergency repairs after an inspection revealed cracks in the concrete.

This project is important not just to Chattanooga, but to all of East Tennessee because of the number of jobs affected. We are almost out of time for a solution – the lock could close in a few years unless progress is made, throwing 150,000 trucks on I-75 and increasing the cost of shipping goods for Oak Ridge, Y-12, and manufacturers across the state.

So you can see how Chickamauga Lock – and other projects like it across the country – ought to be a priority, and why the Corps' budget should be a priority.

In addition to the Corps, we fund the Bureau of Reclamation.

The Bureau of Reclamation delivers water to one in five Western farmers, irrigating 10 million acres of some of the most productive agricultural land in the world.

I would note that this is the first time that Commissioner Lopez and Secretary Gimbel have appeared before this subcommittee, and we welcome them.

Without the infrastructure that these two agencies provide, our nation would be vastly different. With that in mind, we are here today to discuss the administration's fiscal year

2016 budget request for these two agencies. I'll look forward to the testimony of our witnesses, but first would like to hear from our subcommittee's ranking member, Senator Feinstein.

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