

Congresswoman Jen Kiggans - E&W Member Day Testimony - March 25, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Fleischmann and Ranking Member Kaptur for the opportunity to participate in this Member Day.

I want to begin with an issue that is long overdue for action and critically important to my district, the erosion of the Chincoteague Inlet.

The Chincoteague Inlet is a dynamic and rapidly shifting coastal inlet on Virginia's Eastern Shore that serves as a critical navigation channel and harbor of refuge for mariners, while also supporting ecosystem health, and coastal protection. Over time, increasing erosion and sediment movement have destabilized the inlet, threatening the Town of Chincoteague's working waterfront, local homes and businesses, and the surrounding barrier island system. Without a comprehensive feasibility study, we lack the data needed to evaluate long-term stabilization strategies, protect the shoreline, and ensure safe navigation.

This study was authorized under the 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, and the Town formally requested it as far back as 2015. Since then, the community has done everything right, they have secured the required non-federal cost share, received support from the Commonwealth of Virginia, and built strong regional and congressional backing. I have personally pushed for this study at every level, including submitting requests to the Office of Management and Budget for inclusion in the President's FY27 budget, and to the Army Corps of Engineers for inclusion in the FY26 Work Plan. Yet, despite being authorized for nearly a decade and fully ready to move forward, the study has still not been funded or initiated.

This is not just a local issue, it is a federal responsibility. Stabilizing the inlet is essential to protecting major federal assets, including NASA's Wallops Flight Facility, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport, and nearby Navy installations that depend on stable coastal conditions for operational access and mission continuity. As a Member of both the Natural Resources and Armed Services Committees, I see clearly how coastal erosion is not just an environmental challenge, but a direct threat to national security and federal infrastructure. We cannot continue to delay a study that is authorized, has a committed state covered cost-share, and critical to protecting both communities and federal investments. I urge the Committee to prioritize funding for the Chincoteague Inlet feasibility study.

Second, I want to highlight the importance of continued, **robust funding for beach nourishment**.

Federally authorized beach nourishment projects are one of the most effective investments we make in coastal resilience. These projects protect communities from storm damage while sustaining local economies that depend on tourism, recreation, and coastal access.

The return on investment is extraordinary. Studies show for every \$1 spent on beach nourishment, beach tourism generates approximately \$3,000 in economic output, \$1,400 in direct spending, and \$200 in tax revenue. That is a level of economic return that far exceeds most federal programs. In my district, beaches are not just places where people vacation—they are critical infrastructure. They protect homes, businesses, and military installations, and they support an economy that generates billions in activity each year. Without continued federal partnership, these communities are left exposed to increasing storm risks and long-term erosion.

Finally, I want to address the glaring gap in **Coastal Storm Risk Management studies** and the need to ensure they are truly comprehensive.

Communities like those in Hampton Roads rely on the Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate flood risk and identify mitigation strategies. However, current funding limitations and authorities often prevent the Corps from fully accounting for federal infrastructure, particularly military installations, within these studies.

In a region that is home to Naval Station Norfolk and some of the most critical defense assets in the country, this creates a serious gap. Our local and federal infrastructure are interconnected, and planning for one without the other undermines the effectiveness of both.

In addition, I believe we should explore whether the Department of Defense should have the ability to partner more directly with the Army Corps of Engineers to ensure military installations are fully incorporated into Coastal Storm Risk Management studies. In many cases, our most critical national security assets sit alongside vulnerable coastal communities, yet current funding structures do not always allow those federal assets to be fully analyzed within Corps studies.

Providing a mechanism, such as a dedicated fund or transfer authority, for DoD to support these studies would ensure we are protecting military readiness, strengthening coastal resilience, and making smarter, more coordinated federal investments.

Congress should ensure the Corps has the resources and authority to conduct fully comprehensive, region-wide studies that include all at-risk areas, federal and non-federal alike. Doing so will strengthen national security, improve flood protection outcomes, and ensure we are making the most effective use of taxpayer dollars.

Thank you again for the opportunity to highlight these priorities. I look forward to working with the Committee to ensure our coastal communities and critical federal assets are protected for the long term.