

LINDA L. DAHLMEIER  
MAYOR, THE CITY OF OROVILLE

CONGRESSMAN FRED UPTON, CHAIRMAN  
THE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE ENERGY SUBCOMMITTEE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC

RE: HEARING ON "MODERNIZING ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPANDING HYDROPOWER GENERATION, MARCH 15, 2017

Dear Chairman Upton, Ranking Member Rush, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am writing to share my perspective as Mayor for the City of Oroville on the topic of Challenges and Opportunities to Expanding Hydropower Generation.

My small rural town of 19,000 people sits at the base of the Sierra foothills along the banks of the Feather River. While I have always felt blessed to live in Oroville, we are not a wealthy community. The median income for my community is \$36,000 and almost 24% of our residents are below the poverty line. Our town is also home to the tallest dam in America. Until this past month, having the tallest dam bear the name of our town has always been a point of pride. That all changed on February 9th of this year.

The collapse of the main spillway at the Oroville Dam and the near failure of the emergency spillway led to the evacuation of 180,000 people, including virtually all of the residents of my city. People spent hours trying to flee just a few miles, not knowing if the spillway would fail, taking them and their loved ones away. Had the spillway failed, 180,000 people would have died; 28,000,000 would be without a source of water and life as we know it in the state of California would forever be changed. This disaster is one of the worst nightmares any elected official could imagine for their community.

While the dam did not fail, the cost of this event continues, and it goes far beyond the repairs to the dam. The thousands of truck trips to bring materials have degraded many of our roads. Real Estate transactions have declined and escrows

have been cancelled. And recreation, which we depend on in our small community, has come to a standstill with very little options in place for alternatives or recovery.

The Feather River fishery is one of the important elements of our recreation economy. We do not know the long-term impacts the damage has caused to the hatchery. We do know that the mud and silt from the collapsed spillway has killed many of the fish that live in the river and certainly destroyed much of the habitat. We also know that many fish were stranded as the flows ramped down from 50,000 cfs (cubic feet per second) to zero in just a few hours.

River Bend Park, which was built as part of the Settlement Agreement with DWR for the FERC hydropower license for Oroville Dam, was inundated and sustained serious damage. 800 families will be displaced for soccer while the park remains closed and tournaments will be held in other cities. For the past several years we have been working on a river plan that would reconnect the City with the river, and many now wonder if the river is something to embrace or if it should be feared.

Biking and running trails gone. Fishing tournaments gone. Boat ramps closed. Roads closed. Docks closed until further notice. The cost for just the road repair is in the millions. The cost to our community is overwhelming. How can we move forward from here? We need your help.

First, the residents of Oroville and the surrounding areas deserve to know how this happened. Several public interest organizations brought up the inadequacy of the emergency spillway during the FERC relicensing process in 2005. FERC and the California Department of Water Resources assured us that the dam was safe and could handle any foreseeable flood event. We in Oroville believed this to be true. The fact the emergency spillway was supposedly rated to 350,000 cfs and yet it nearly failed with a flow of just 12,000 cfs tells us that the dam safety regulators at FERC did not take the safety of the citizens of my town seriously.

While some testifying before your committee recommended a 50% expansion in our nation's hydropower, we believe the safety and integrity of the nation's

existing hydropower infrastructure needs to be addressed before you consider legislation to promote new hydropower.

With this concern in mind, we request an oversight hearing on FERC's Division of Dam Safety to determine how this regulatory failure occurred. Second, we need to have a full analysis of the impacts of this event to Oroville and the surrounding areas. This should include the direct and indirect impacts to services, infrastructure, and local economies. We also need to have a full analysis of the impacts to the Feather River and how that will impact current and future recreation.

Lastly, we need to have a process to discuss with FERC, DWR, and the water beneficiaries of this project about how these impacts will be mitigated. The fact is that the benefits from the Oroville project are immense. California does not exist in its current form without the water from this project. But it is the people from my community that were in harms way when parts of this project failed. We need to be made whole before any discussion moves forward regarding expanding the role of dams and hydropower.

I sincerely hope that this committee would want to know more about the regulatory failure that occurred at the Oroville Dam before any consideration is given to expanding FERC's regulatory authority on promoting development of new hydropower infrastructure in this country.

Respectfully,

Mayor Linda L. Dahlmeier