

Opening Statement

843 words, ~5 min

Thank you everyone for joining us today for an important hearing looking at the state of western water infrastructure and innovation.

While *water* infrastructure is not something that always comes to mind when people think of our infrastructure, the fact is that water infrastructure is as crucial to our lives, health, and economies as the roads and bridges that typically get discussed during our infrastructure debates.

Despite its importance, federal investment in our water infrastructure has, unfortunately, not kept pace with our needs. In fact, while federal investment in roads and bridges has remained steady in recent decades, federal investment in water infrastructure has declined dramatically.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, in the past 30 years the federal government's contribution to water infrastructure spending has fallen from 63 percent of total capital spending to a mere 9 percent in recent years.

This is truly regrettable and an unfortunate departure from previous generations. During the 20th Century, our nation's policy makers recognized the need for robust water infrastructure investment, particularly in the arid west.

During the 20th Century, the Bureau of Reclamation constructed hundreds of large western water infrastructure projects. These projects transformed the western United States from an arid and largely unsettled region into one of the most dynamic, vibrant, and economically successful regions of the world.

Unfortunately, much of this infrastructure is now more than a half century old and nearing the end of its design life. Substantial investment will be required for the continued operation and maintenance of this existing infrastructure.

And beyond our existing infrastructure, significant funding will be needed for the construction of new, 21st Century water infrastructure as well. After all, our 20th Century water infrastructure projects will not necessarily meet all of the challenges we face in the 21st Century.

During the 20th Century, the Bureau of Reclamation focused primarily on the construction of new dams and canals. And while new storage projects will be an important element of future infrastructure development, it's clear that we can't rely exclusively on new storage infrastructure to meet our modern water challenges.

The 21st Century requires an all-of-the-above water infrastructure strategy that includes climate and drought-resistant projects such as desalination and water reuse along with new groundwater recharge projects, stormwater capture, and well-designed surface storage. Despite our clear need for an all-of-the-above investment plan, we still sometimes see a narrow focus on just surface storage in some quarters.

For example, this administration has frequently discussed the need for new storage. At the same time, the President's recent budget proposed a 71% cut for WaterSMART efficiency projects and a 95% cut for Title XVI water reuse projects. These are irresponsible proposed cuts for infrastructure projects that can create drought-resistant water supplies for millions of Americans.

Instead of cutting funding, Congress should dramatically *increase* our investment in modern water infrastructure. There is currently a backlog of more than \$400 million for Title XVI reuse projects that have been authorized by Congress but remain unconstructed. Additionally, more than \$500 million is needed to complete water reuse projects eligible for funding under the WIIN Act, and this figure is only expected to grow. Simply put, Congress must develop solutions to address these and other funding shortfalls.

I look forward to hearing more from our witnesses today about our infrastructure needs and potential funding solutions that Congress should further examine. One proposal I would like to explore further is the idea of turning the Reclamation Fund into a true revolving fund that can help finance our infrastructure needs.

After all, the Reclamation Fund was created by Congress specifically to fund western water infrastructure. And while receipts to the Reclamation Fund currently help pay for *some* of our water needs, unfortunately Congress is not fully appropriating Reclamation Fund receipts for water infrastructure.

In fact, the Reclamation Fund currently has a surplus of \$16 billion dollars and growing. Fully utilizing the Reclamation Fund for its original purpose of water infrastructure development will do a great deal to help us meet today's water challenges.

I should note that meeting the water challenges of the 21st Century will also require innovation on the part of our water managers. Fortunately, so many of our water managers are up to the task. Our water managers are innovating in numerous areas such as advanced water reuse, forecast informed reservoir operations, and cutting-edge research and development work on many promising new technologies. I believe the federal government must fully support and encourage this innovation. I look forward to hearing more about the innovative work of our water managers and about how Congress can better support these efforts.

With that, I want to thank our witnesses again for joining us. Today's hearing is about learning more about our modern water management challenges and exploring the ways that this Subcommittee can help meet these challenges in the 21st Century. I look forward to the discussion.

I will now invite the Ranking Member to say a few remarks, and then we will welcome and introduce our witnesses.