

**Member Day Testimony before Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Rep. Jim Cooper (TN-5)
Feb. 27, 2020**

You can solve my problem with no money and three words: “flood control storage.”

I represent Nashville, Tennessee, a thriving, fast-growing city on the Cumberland River that lies below two dams, Old Hickory and Cordell Hull, that are not allowed to be used for “flood control storage” under their congressional authorizations. These are so-called “run-of-river” dams that can be used for “flood *surcharge* storage” but not to mitigate flooding downstream during torrential rainfalls.

Nashville suffered billions of dollars of flood damages in the 2010 flood but, in the ten years since, very little has been done to mitigate the chance of future flooding. The Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District, has participated in numerous home buyouts and other minor improvements but their proposals for a \$100 million downtown floodwall and a small \$18 million dry dam have not come close to fruition. I am not asking you for any money, only three words that will allow us to better manage our river.

On the tenth anniversary of the catastrophic flood, Nashvillians are naturally asking what has been done to reduce the chance of reoccurrence. By adding these three words to the authorization of the two dams, this Committee can finally give the Corps the flexibility it has long needed to better manage flooding of the Cumberland, the most flood-prone navigable waterway in the United States.

The straight jacket that the Corps has been operating under only allows Old Hickory and Cordell Hull to be used for navigation and hydropower. These are important functions but increasingly outmoded, at least during flood events. There is only one barge customer left above Old Hickory and TVA is easily able to adjust electrical loads. In fact, one of the three turbines at Old Hickory has been down for repairs for some time with few adverse consequences. Power generation must be suspended during flood events anyway.

During heavy rainfall, however, Nashville is in urgent need of having better flood protection all along its 67 miles of river frontage. Below Nashville, Cheatham County is also in need. Allowing these dams to be used for flood control storage could give the Corps the flexibility it needs to protect everyone downstream, as well as the management flexibility it needs to prevent possible over-topping of the dams. During the 2010 flood, the Corps came within 7 inches of overtopping Old Hickory, a tragedy that would have been even more devastating to Nashville. Overtopping would have, according to the Corps, increased flooding by four feet, adding many billions of dollars-worth of damage.

I know that Old Hickory and Cordell Hull were not designed to be flood control dams, and that dock owners on the lakes will not enjoy even a temporary draw-down of lake levels. But lowering lake levels in advance of huge rains will not do any structural harm to the dams but would give the Corps much more margin of error in the event of any unexpected deluge or other unanticipated event. Seven inches is way too close a call for one of America’s most dynamic cities. And I am sure that boaters upstream will accept a minor inconvenience if that is the price they pay for saving Nashville in an extraordinary event. I am certain that they would prefer temporary low levels to any tax increase to pay for the catastrophic damage that severe flooding will cause. ###