



United States Congressman — First District, Nebraska

JEFF FORTENBERRY

Statement by the Honorable Jeff Fortenberry

Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

February 27, 2020

Hearing on the Water Resources Development Act

Chairwoman Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the subcommittee: Thank you for holding this hearing to allow me and other Members to highlight our priority issues as you develop the Water Resources Development Act of 2020.

Nearly a year ago, Nebraska experienced a devastating 500-year-flood event. Nebraskans responded with characteristic care and resilience. Earlier this month I introduced H.R. 5868, the RELIEF Act, to make water infrastructure repairs in the wake of such disasters more timely and cost-efficient. I am requesting your assistance in including the provisions of this legislation in the new WRDA bill.

In Nebraska, we have 23 natural resources districts. These local government units work to manage, conserve, and develop the state's natural resources. If enacted, the RELIEF Act would capitalize these natural resources districts to swiftly make Corps-approved repairs in order to free up federal resources for those areas of a disaster that require federal assistance.

Quite simply, this approach would help create efficient, common sense solutions that save time and money for the Corps, so that they and the non-federal sponsors can better serve the community. The goal is to reduce the time between disaster and repair/recovery. This would benefit both the local sponsor and the federal government by ensuring those that are capable of making Corps-approved repairs can do them in a more efficient manner.

If this authority had been in place during the 2019 flood, the natural resources districts would have been able to mobilize and make temporary repairs to flood-related infrastructure damage in a matter of days in order to prevent further damages from occurring in another high water event. Permanent flood induced infrastructure repairs could have been made in a matter of weeks. It's also important to emphasize the cost component since local sponsors are often able to make certain repairs for much less than the price paid by the federal government.

I appreciate this opportunity to highlight this important measure and I ask for your help to include it in the new WRDA bill.