

Congressman Garret Graves, Louisiana's 6th Congressional District
Member Day Testimony
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development

Chair Kaptur and Ranking Member Simpson, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance of prioritizing investment in our nation's infrastructure.

We have a fundamental problem in the water resources space: The Army Corps of Engineers is our primary resilience agency, but the Corps has a backlog in congressionally authorized projects that would take 100 years to complete if we continue to appropriate funding for authorized projects at the current rate. There is plenty of blame to go around for this backlog, and I want to start by pointing out some questions which need to be addressed by authorizing committees:

- Should we continue to allow the Corps to bill individual projects for their administrative costs?
- Is the mission of the Army Corps' Civil Works division compatible with the mission of the Department of Defense? – This organizational structure is fundamental to the Corps' dysfunction and should be reallocated to an agency that ensures that the civil works mission is the national priority it should be. I want to lend my support to the administration's reorganization of the federal government in this area, as well as recent efforts to centralize and ensure non-duplicative permitting processes.
- Lastly, why do Corps of Engineers projects routinely cost two to three times the cost of state and local estimates, and how can we leverage local capabilities to get all of these projects completed as soon as possible?

While there is much work to be done, there are also changes that need to be made in the appropriations process to ensure the efficiency of federal investment.

In an effort to ensure non-duplication of support, the Appropriations Committee has placed restrictions that prevent some funding streams from being allocated to authorized Army Corps of Engineers Projects. This provision has been included in several supplemental appropriations bills and actually makes it *more* of a liability for an infrastructure project to receive congressional authorization. I want to urge the committee to reverse their course in this effort: we should be *eliminating* obstacles and disincentives to using other federal funds to implement Corps projects — such as FEMA's PDMP and

HMGP, HUD's CDBG-DR and others. The fact of the matter is that there is no project in the federal government that goes through the technical, environmental and economic scrutiny of Corps projects and we should be pushing other federal program funds to these projects, not prohibiting them. These funding sources only compliment the hard work of our state and local governments. In my state, Non-Federal sponsors of Corps projects invest billions of dollars in ecological restoration and flood mitigation projects. We need to encourage all stakeholders in these projects to work together for the common goal of getting these projects over the finish line.

Many of you have heard me say this in the past, but the waters that flow through the Mississippi River in my district is drainage from two Canadian provinces, water from every state between Montana and New York, and is the largest watershed in the United States and *one* of the largest in the world. As you know, right now the 3rd highest volume of water on the river in recorded history is heading for my district and the outlet of the river into the Gulf of Mexico. I say this to underscore that investment in water infrastructure generally, as well as in the region I represent, is crucial to our nation.

However, there is a stereotype that supporting Army Corps of Engineers projects equates to pork-barrel spending. Without transparency, that can be true. However, there are many projects that would actually provide a substantial savings to federal taxpayers. You may be surprised to hear that many of these opportunities are in Louisiana:

- Louisiana is home to five of the top 15 tonnage ports in the United States. Using our ports and waterways to move cargo gets it off our roads, reduces energy consumption, has lower emissions and has lower costs as compared to other options. Our state has been working with the Corps on Mississippi River deepening for not years, but decades. This project has been authorized and needs to be funded. Unfortunately, the budget request does not include funding for this important project. Our waterways handle near one-quarter of the maritime commerce in the United States. We access 31 states through our waterways and load nearly 65% of the grains in the midwest. We are decades behind investment. Funding this project and managing the implementation in the right way can help to address two problems: 1) deepening the river to meet shipping trends, 2) use the dredge material to advance the Louisiana Coastal Project to restore a portion of the 2000 square miles of Louisiana coastal wetlands.
- The Morganza to the Gulf project has a history dating back to the 1980s. The project or project components have been authorized by Congress at least three times and approximately

\$80,000,000 without a single dollar in CG funds being invested in construction of the project. As we have waited these decades, over \$1,000,000,000 in federal funds have been spent on FEMA claims in the area. We are working with the Corps, Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District, the South Lafourche Levee District and others to right-size this project and to reevaluate the engineering standards. Efforts so far have identified substantial cost savings and value for taxpayers.

- Old River Control Structure diverts approximately a 70/30 split of flow on the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers. The management of freshwater and sediment in the vicinity of this structure is dangerous. This river system is one of the largest in the world. Historically, we opened the Bonnet Carre Spillway once per decade, we have been forced to open this “pressure relief valve” three of the last four years. The riverbed has not been properly managed. Spillway operations are primarily based upon flow or volume. With the sediment build up above and below the structure, the same flow of water today may be several feet higher on the levees than it was a few decades ago. This is dangerous and not consistent with levee designs. The Committee must work with the Corps to address this urgent situation.
- Lastly, the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) is a program not unlike the Everglades restoration project, restoring 2,000 square miles of wetlands under the jurisdiction of the Corps. The degradation of this ecosystem has occurred because of mismanagement by the federal government. The State of Louisiana’s Coastal Masterplan provides the map for restoring much of this habitat and ensuring its future resilience and I want to urge federal support of the state’s work in this area.

Members of the Committee, I’d like to end by noting that many Army Corps projects in my district received funding in recent supplemental appropriations packages. I want to deeply thank the committee for providing these resources, but I do want to note that had these congressionally authorized projects received the funding they needed before our 2016 flood, there may not have been a need for supplemental appropriation. Countless studies have shown that delaying investment in water infrastructure results in the devastation of communities, loss of lives, disruption of the economy, degradation of our environment, and a much higher price tag to our taxpayers in disaster response costs. My experience with our flood bears this out, and I want to urge the committee to protect our nation from these kind of disasters by prioritizing proactive investment.

Thank you again for providing me the opportunity to speak to you on these important priorities for Louisiana's 6th Congressional District and please let me know if you have additional questions regarding these priorities.