

**Statement of
The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing On
“Agency Budgets and Priorities for FY 2010 (Part 2)”
June 16, 2009**

Chairwoman Johnson, thank you for holding this hearing on the administration's budget proposals for fiscal year 2010. I would like to thank our agency witnesses from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Sector of the International Boundary and Water Commission, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry for participating in this hearing.

First, let me say that the work done by your agencies is critically important to the safety of the American people and to the recovery of our economy. It is work that is greatly appreciated by this Committee and integral to our agenda.

Our Committee uses these annual budget hearings to evaluate where the administration is placing its priorities, and to engage the agencies under our jurisdiction in dialogue concerning various policy decisions that were made. At a budget hearing earlier this month Chairwoman Johnson noted that after eight years “Change has finally come” to the President's annual budget request. I would like to say that this sentiment continues into today's proceedings, but for one key agency with us today, it does not.

The administration's FY 2010 budget proposes \$5.084 billion for the Corps of Engineers civil works program. I have stated time and time again that Corps projects are vital to the economic growth and environmental wellbeing of this county. This year's request for the Corps represents a \$318.4 million cut from Fiscal Year 2009 appropriation levels. As was evident in the differences between the Corps' stated \$12 billion in ready-to-go projects for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and the \$4.6 billion it received, there is a substantial unmet need at the Corps. This agency cannot afford anymore cuts. Specifically, these cuts will limit the agency's ability study, design and construct new infrastructure projects.

While I am pleased to see that the administration has requested a \$302.1 million increase in funding for the operation and maintenance account, I am disturbed to see that the request includes a \$423.7 million reduction in construction account funds from fiscal year 2009 appropriated levels. Funds from the construction account are used in the construction of a wide array of projects under the Corps mission areas or are made available for projects through water resources development legislation.

Additionally, the administration has proposed to focus construction funds on “those investments that provide the best return from a national perspective in achieving economic, environmental and public safety objectives.” While I applaud the desire to lead with those projects that achieve the highest return on our investment, I can assure you that the need for projects that fall under these guidelines far outweighs what you have requested.

I would also remind our witnesses that the Committee is continuing its oversight of spending through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Again, the civil

works program of the Corps received \$4.6 billion from the Recovery act. I assure you, this Committee is watching with a careful eye to ensure that money is being spent properly, for the purpose it was intended, and that it is being obligated quickly.

I am pleased to see that the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry with us here today. ATSDR has renewed its commitment to protect the public from chemicals of concern. Since its creation in 1985, ATSDR has been the nation's lead public health agency for chemical safety. After evaluating your budget request, I see that you are taking seriously your job to identify and evaluate exposures to hazardous substances and to ensure that you have the means necessary to take appropriate actions to prevent and mitigate future exposures.

In order to do this, one must adequately take into account new chemicals of concern, new sites that fall under Superfund, and the funding mechanism by which you operate. This year's request proposes that funds for ATSDR come from general revenues, but also calls for a reinstatement of the taxes that historically funded the Superfund trust fund. Letting the trust fund expire in 1995 was one of the greatest mistakes of the former majority and am hopeful that the administration's call for reinstatement of revenue for the trust fund will be the impetus for this needed change.

Additionally, we have a representative from the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission. The President's request for IBWC includes an increase of \$0.7 million over fiscal year 2009 appropriations levels and is consistent with past requests. This includes funding for important environmental and infrastructure projects along the United States – New Mexico border.

Once again, I would like to take this moment to thank Chairwoman Johnson for her leadership on this Subcommittee, and I want to thank all of our agency representatives for testifying today.

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