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Thursday, January 11, 2024

Testimony of Congressman Ed Case
Water Resources Development Act 2024 Member Day

Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for allowing me to testify today on critical priorities for Hawai'i ahead of the Committee's consideration of the 2024 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Mahalo again to you, Ranking Member Larsen, for visiting Honolulu last week to examine our WRDA needs and other infrastructure priorities in person.

While I will also be submitting policy-related requests for your consideration, I want to highlight two critical current U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects that must be addressed in WRDA this year. Without further action by Congress, both the ongoing Honolulu Harbor Modifications and Ala Wai Flood Risk Management projects could face long-term delays with significant consequences. While located in my district of Honolulu proper and of direct relevance to hundreds of thousands of my constituents, both projects are also crucial to the basic functioning of Hawai'i statewide.

The Ala Wai Flood Risk Management Project began in 1999 and was authorized and funded by Congress for design and construction in the 2018 WRDA. The project will address severe flood risks across the Ala Wai watershed, running from the top of the Ko'olau mountains through much of central Honolulu to the ocean. that endanger the property, livelihoods and lives of some 200,000 residents in Honolulu. Waikiki, the engine of our top economy, also lies exclusively within this watershed, and an unmitigated flood of any magnitude would cause untold damage to our overall economy. The Corps estimates that a major flood in the watershed would cause more than \$1.1 billion to structures alone; that is likely conservative and does not include overall economic damage.

The Corps has worked to revise its original plan, authorized in the prior WRDA, in an effort to meet community concerns, and ultimately paused the project in June 2021 while those concerns were addressed. The Corps has recently released a proposed revised plan at a cost of \$1 billion-plus; that plan is currently out for comment with an expected finalization in April-June of this year. The continuation of this critical project will require further WRDA authorization.

Also in central Honolulu, Honolulu Harbor, the State of Hawaii's primary harbor is overdue for extensive modifications to assure our current and next-generation maritime needs. The Harbor, which in its modern configuration was completed in 1952, is the lynchpin to life in Hawai'i. As

an isolated island state, about 80 percent of Hawaii's goods and materials are imported, 95 percent of which arrive by ship through Honolulu Harbor. The Harbor serves not only the Island of O'ahu, but also is the transshipment point for virtually all shipping imports to the other islands of Hawai'i. It is further the shipping point for exports from O'ahu and the rest of the state.

The Harbor is way overdue for basic navigational and operational upgrades which are required for continued functioning for both civilian use and elements of our military communities. Congress recognized as much by authorizing and funding a full Army Corps study of modifications through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. While that investigation is already well underway, the Corps believes that the study authorization must be updated to reflect expanded complexity, scope and funding needs.

Additionally, in the course of the initial investigation, the local partner, the Hawai'i State Department of Transportation, has strongly expressed the necessity of expanding the study scope to include elements of coastal storm risk management. Providing this additional refined and expanded authorization will ensure our critical harbor is designed for resilience and that this literal lifeline for Hawai'i remains operational in the face of natural disaster and weather modification contingencies.

Mahalo again for allowing me to testify in support of these two critical projects. I look forward to working with the Committee to advance these updated authorizations in the current WRDA cycle.