

Testimony of Congressman Clay Higgins (La-03)

*Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Water Resources and
Development Act (WRDA) Member Day Hearing*

- Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today.
- As the representative for Louisiana's Third Congressional District, I want to thank all of you for your continued focus on the health of our nation's waterways, and for the thoughtful consideration you will no doubt give to the issues before you today.
- Like many of my colleagues, I am here to discuss the impact of many of the projects and issues that your committee has been discussing as you continue to work on this year's Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).
- I am sure that it is no surprise that a member of the Louisiana delegation is here before you to talk about the importance of the 5,000 miles of navigable rivers, bayous, creeks and canals that make up our state's waterways.
- The importance of these waterways to Louisiana and the entire nation cannot be underestimated. Coastal Louisiana leads the nation in waterborne commerce:
 - 60% of U.S. grain moves through our coastal ports; and
 - 21% of all commercial fisheries landings by weight from the lower 48 states come from our region.
 - 23% of the total U.S. Crude is produced in LA.
 - 18% of the US oil supply comes from Port Fourchon.
 - 20% of the nation's waterborne commerce travels through LA waters.
 - 5 million waterfowl depend on Louisiana for habitat.
- While many of you know of the important role that large waterway systems like the Mississippi River and its tributaries play in our economy, you may not know the drastic impacts that focused Corps of Engineers' (Corps) attention, WRDA authorization, and work plan dollars can play on smaller systems.

- Take for instance the Calcasieu channel, which is 68 miles long and authorized to be dredged to 400 feet wide and 40 feet deep. This channel requires around \$40 million a year to be completely dredged. Which may sound like a lot, but when you consider that this channel is the sole access point to the Gulf of Mexico not only for the existing industry in the area, but also for over \$100 billion in new projects.
- This means thousands upon thousands of jobs are completely reliant on making sure that the types of authorizations and expenditures we are talking about today are considered and made expeditiously.
- It is also imperative that we continue to make improvements to the functioning of the Corps. An example of one type of improvement is my amendment that was added on the floor to the 2018 WRDA bill that made a commonsense change to the way that the Corps obtains easements for completing projects. This amendment focused on removing unnecessary burdens and costs that the Corps was mandated to take and jeopardized progress on several projects in my district. Since its implementation, the Corps has been able to move forward with work they would not have otherwise been able to do. I want to thank my friend and colleague, Congressman Garret Graves, for his leadership and assistance with getting that important amendment added.
- Beyond the economic impacts of the work you are doing today, it is also important to remember that the health of these waterways also is related to flood protection. 2 million people live in Coastal Louisiana, and as many of you know we have experienced several devastating floods and hurricanes in recent years.
- Healthy and well-maintained waterways are an important resource in the flood mitigation arena. Authorizing maintenance projects for economic purposes often have a side benefit of providing an extra layer of protection for water related disasters. Spending millions now to dredge these systems helps save us billions when the storms clear.
- Thank you again to the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and members of the committee for allowing me to speak today.