

Statement of Congressman Dave Loebsack (IA-02)  
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Members' Day Hearing  
February 27, 2020

I want to thank Chairmen DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chairwoman Napolitano and Ranking Member Westerman for giving Members of Congress the opportunity to present testimony on the 2020 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) work on water projects is vital to rural communities such as those in my district. I would like to take the time to highlight three important requests for my district today.

First, I would like to bring attention to a rural water supply in my district. Rathbun Regional Water Association (RRWA) is the largest rural water association in Iowa and one of the largest in the United States. RRWA supplies drinking water to more than 70,000 people in 15 counties in southeast Iowa and northeast Missouri from the Association's two water treatment plants at Rathbun Lake. There has been a steady growth in the demand for drinking water from RRWA. Rathbun has invested more than \$50 million to increase its capacity to treat and distribute drinking water, included in this was the construction of a second water treatment plant.

Rathbun Lake has 15,000 acre-feet of storage allocated for water supply. RRWA has purchased 6,680 acre-feet from the Corps. RRWA also has the right of first refusal for the remaining 8,320 acre-feet of water supply storage in Rathbun Lake. Acquisition of the remaining 8,320 acre-feet of water supply would help ensure RRWA is able to satisfy the demand for drinking water in the area. I have had the pleasure of visiting Rathbun Lake during my time in Congress and know how the folks in the area depend on it for clean, safe drinking water.

Today, I ask that the Committee consider including a provision in WRDA 2020 so that low income communities such as those served by RRWA have first rights to remaining water supply storage in their regions at a reduced rate. The Corps estimated that the remaining water storage in Rathbun Lake would be \$3.24 million to purchase at about a rate of \$389 per acre-foot. I request that regional water systems deemed to serve low income communities have the right to purchase remaining water supplies at \$100 per acre-foot, allowing these rural communities to maintain essential water sources in their regions. We must do what we can to keep these rural water sources supplying the communities around them.

Second, I would like to highlight my legislation the National Flood Research and Education Center Act of 2019 (H.R. 3091). Flooding costs the U.S. billions of dollars each year. Last March 2019, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan experienced substantial flooding costing an estimated \$10.8 billion. As we enter March 2020, our states prepare for another flood season. These costly and dangerous events are becoming more common and we need to improve monitoring and forecasting of hydrologic conditions.

My legislation would establish a National Flood Research and Education Consortium (NFREC or National Flood Center) to conduct research on flooding, flood prevention, and other flood-related issues. The National Flood Center will be led by an institution of higher education that has significant expertise and experience in examining flooding and related issues. The lead institute will partner with other institutions that share expertise in flood-related fields. The research from participating institutions will be responsible for policy recommendations as they relate to predicting, preparing, preventing and recovering from floods.

The legislation would also create the Office of Flood Research and Policy (OFRP) within NOAA. The NOAA Administrator will appoint a Director to manage and oversee the work of the National Flood Center and to review and make policy and best practice recommendations to Congress, the public, and other federal agencies involved with flooding-related issues. These recommendations and the research that a National Flood Center would accomplish will better prepare communities and states to respond to flooding and to mitigate flood damage in advance.

A National Flood Center will bring together experts in physical and environmental science, as well as those in engineering, sociology and economics. Flooding, flood prevention, and flood related socio-economic, environmental, health and policy issues are highly complex with implications for loss of life and billions in damage as we saw in the Midwest one year ago. The damage to all sectors of our economy is why a national-level comprehensive and collaborative research and policy effort is needed. That is why today I ask the Committee to consider including my legislation as part of WRDA 2020 in order to better prepare our communities for the impact of severe flooding.

Lastly, I think it is important to discuss construction projects on our inland waterways transportation systems. These natural highways are essential for moving farm products to export grain elevators along the Gulf. These systems are not only necessary for transportation of goods across our nation but also help aid in flood control. But over half of our inland waterway system is more than 50 years old. These systems are in desperate need of modernization and Congress needs to help speed up these efforts.

The Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF) is funded through a fuel tax on commercial operators. While the increase in fuel tax in 2014 from \$0.20 to \$0.29 per gallon has helped to stabilize the IWTF, there is a backlog of projects that needs to be addressed. In WRRDA 2014, The Olmsted Locks and Dam Project reduced its cost-sharing requirements from 50% from the IWTF and 50% from the General Treasury Fund to 15% from the IWTF and 85% from the General Fund. This adjustment helped the project's efficiency and it was completed 4 years ahead of schedule which allowed other necessary projects to be started.

I ask the Committee to consider making permanent a new cost-sharing ratio for construction projects on our inland waterways. I believe having a consistent cost-share of 25% from the IWTF and 75% from the General Fund would allow the backlog of necessary construction and modernization projects to be started and give the workers a more sustainable funding stream to ensure projects continue to completion.