

Rep. Olson  
Member Day Hearing 2/27/2020

Chairwoman Napolitano and ranking member Westerman, thank you for the opportunity to speak on WRDA today.

I represent the 22nd Congressional District in Texas, in the greater Houston region. Sadly, Houston is no stranger to hurricanes, devastating storms and the flooding that they bring.

Parts of Texas are still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Harvey, more than two years later.

It's not a matter of "if," but "when" the next storm will hit.

Because of this, local leaders throughout TX-22 wake up each morning looking for new, innovative ways to provide needed safety to our community. And elected officials like US work to ensure the federal government is using resources wisely so our vulnerable communities are prepared when disaster strikes.

Section 1043 reauthorization is an important way we can help, giving non-federal entities authorization to construct Army Corps projects.

The Army Corps granted Section 1043 authorization for the Clear Creek Flood Risk Management project in my district. It was the first time that such authorization WAS provided for a complete project. This allows Harris County Flood Control District, the non-federal sponsor to move quickly to construct the Clear Creek project – first authorized decades ago - to provide flood protection to thousands of individuals within my district.

However, this process required a rushed timeframe. Because Congress failed to specifically reauthorize Section 1043 during the 2018 WRDA debate, the program expired on June 11th of 2019. This required Harris County Flood Control District, who took on the responsibility for this important project, to work on an express timeline to reach an agreement before the shot clock hit zero.

That's why I ask that Section 1043(a) and 1043(b) of the 2014 WRDA be reinstated. Every community that wishes to pursue such authorization should have the chance to do so.

Authorizing current projects funded through Disaster Supplementals is another good move Congress can make.

So-called “500 Year Floods” have become more frequent. In Houston, the Memorial Day Flood in May 2015 and the Tax Day Flood in April 2016 caused over \$3 billion dollars in damage and took the lives of 16 people.

Then came Hurricane Harvey, which hit Texas on August 25th, 2017. It became the most costly storm in U.S. history — with damage estimates coming in at \$190 billion dollars.

According to the Houston chronicle, TX has led the nation in flood related deaths for the last 50 years.

I’m proud of the work we did in Congress to quickly come together and work to provide needed federal assistance to make these devastated communities whole.

Yet it would be pointless to invest so much in repair without pairing such funding with prevention. Investing in projects and studies to ensure that Houston and other communities devastated by Hurricanes Harvey, Maria and Irma become more resilient when faced with future storms was a vital component of the work Congress did as part of our Hurricane Harvey response.

Many of these studies are ongoing as I speak, and are set to finish in fiscal year 2021.

Sadly, once these studies are completed, and chiefs’ reports are finalized, they will sit and wait for authorization from Congress. Every moment those studies sit collecting dust without congressional action is time that our vulnerable communities can’t afford to waste.

I plan to file an amendment to this year’s WRDA to authorize projects that have been identified in a section 216 study and included in a chief’s report.

This amendment will help cut red tape and allow disaster-stricken communities such as mine in desperate need of mitigation and stronger infrastructure to move forward.

Thank you to the Transportation and Infrastructure’s Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment for hosting this important hearing today. Reauthorization of a strong WRDA will bolster our infrastructure, better prepare our communities and help save lives.

Thank you.