

Rep. Peters

Member Day Testimony 2/27/2020

Chair Napolitano and Ranking Member Westerman:

Thank you for hosting “Member Day” for your colleagues like me who have important requests for the Water Resources and Development Act.

I’m here to highlight a few priorities that impact my district and the country as a whole, including

1. the deauthorization of a section of a levee in the San Diego River;
2. ongoing sewage spills along the U.S.-Mexico coastal border; and
3. improving water reclamation in San Diego.

In my district, we have the San Diego River Levee System, constructed in 1958. The levee system extends for a distance of 4.6 miles throughout the San Diego River. The most upstream segment of the levee system has been modified by infrastructure, including a police station; regional transit station; multiple bridge crossings, including I-5; and a major thoroughfare, Friars Road. This portion of the levee system no longer convey the flows for which it was originally designed, but it does convey a storm event with a one percent chance of occurring any given year. The impact of climate change practically guarantees these storms will occur and grow stronger and more frequent.

An inspection by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 2016 determined that the system poses an unacceptable risk to public safety. In order to properly and comprehensively evaluate the needed modifications to address system deficiencies, we are working with Army Corps to deauthorize the most upstream segment that has been irreparably modified by infrastructure. Army Corps are working with my office to prepare legislative language to deauthorize this segment of the levee system, and I ask the Committee include this urgent request in WRDA.

Additionally, the San Diego delegation is continuing to tackle cross border pollution. Since at least 1944, the federal government has tried, and failed, to stop flows of treated and untreated sewage in the U.S. from the Tijuana river in Mexico. It has not been for lack of trying. I want to thank the Committee for its past efforts in 2000, 2004, and a hearing in 2007 to address the problem.

We just learned that implementing legislation for the approval of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) will provide a new authorization of \$300 million, in equal installments of \$75 million over four years, to fund Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants under the Border Water Infrastructure Program (BWIP) to address wastewater infrastructure problems along the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition, the Delegation secured an additional \$25 million in funding for BWIP in the FY 2020 Omnibus. The BWIP makes critical investment to improve sewage infrastructure along the border and prevent dangerous sewage spills that threaten public health and damage San Diegans' quality of life in the future.

Inter-agency coordination will be critically important as local, state and federal stakeholders start to allocate funding for new project construction. On behalf of the San Diego delegation, I thank the Army Corps of Engineers for authorizing the 2017 Tijuana River Feasibility study and the Committee's continued support helping the City of San Diego to solve this complex issue along the Tijuana River watershed.

Finally, I would like to address briefly the matter of water supply. Historic drought conditions combined with a shortage of melting snow have created a water supply crisis in western states, including California. To meet projected water demands, the City of San Diego is making a long-term investment in the Pure Water Program, a multi-year, multi-billion-dollar program that will use proven water purification technology to provide one-third of San Diego's water supply by 2035.

Pure Water is a cost-effective investment to address San Diego's water needs and will provide a reliable, sustainable water supply, reducing the City's reliance on Northern

California and Colorado River resources. It will also significantly reduce ocean discharge by diverting wastewater from the nearby Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant. Currently, Point Loma meets alternate discharge standards in a modified National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit approved by EPA. Although the City has never failed to renew its modified permit, the renewal process creates unnecessary regulatory uncertainty for ratepayers and municipal water and sewer authorities.

I introduced the Ocean Pollution Reduction Act II of 2019 with the San Diego delegation to provide the City with regulatory certainty as it continues to make significant progress, as well as major investments, in enhancing its water and wastewater systems. The bill simply clarifies that the City of San Diego can apply for a permit under the standard NPDES renewal process without a waiver. The clarification will provide the City with regulatory certainty as it continues to make significant progress, as well as major investments, in enhancing its water and wastewater systems.

I would appreciate the Committee's consideration of this important issue as part of any legislation authorizing investments in water and sanitation infrastructure.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these matters. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these and other issues.