

Testimony of Congressman Mike Johnson (LA-04)
Submitted to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
March 6, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Kaptur and my colleagues and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify in front of the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee on the importance of developing and maintaining Louisiana and the nation's water infrastructure needs.

Today, I ask the committee to help fund dredging these that will provide much needed resources related to flooding and navigation benefits and not forget the tremendous benefit that shallow draft waterways in ports having bring in jobs back to the United States.

The role our inland waterways system plays an integral part of our nation's maritime system and it's critically important to our prosperity as a country. In my district, Louisiana's fourth district, some of our biggest challenges and yet some of our greatest opportunities revolve around port infrastructure and further development of the navigation of our rivers. We have four shallow draft port authorities which service 485 miles of navigable waterways and shallow draft river miles.

As many of you are aware, the Red River in Northwest Louisiana experienced a historic flood event in June of 2015 which affected 21 of our parishes (ph). This flood along with a series of other recent flooding events have significantly damaged our navigation structures and they're currently threatening the maintenance of the channel and the safety of our residence. And immediate issue that was identified was how far of the actual rivers flood stage crest was from the projected crest, which is based on a 1990 flood of record.

The flood crest in 2015 was significantly higher than the flood crest in 1990 with less volume of water measured at the Shreveport gauge, which is our primary gauge there. The higher flood stage caused significant damage to homes and agricultural land of businesses, our oil and gas industry and our public infrastructures.

In order to determine the reasons for these discrepancies, a sedimentation survey in hydraulic model from Army Corps of Engineers is necessary. The \$1.5 million study is authorized under the existing J. Bennett Johnson Waterway project, constructions general account.

Unfortunately, only \$250,000 was allocated in fiscal year 2016. Robust funding is desperately needed to help projects such as this come to fruition. If this survey and the model are not completed and analyzed, the 350,000 acres and approximately 58,000 residents of the area will continue to suffer from future flood events. It's imminent.

A second major issue concerns the protection of our major infrastructure. River levels have come within feet of entering mini structures in Bossier City on the other side of the river from Shreveport.

Due to the damaged river profile, it's highly likely that levies need to be raised and flood wall constructed to protect existing infrastructure. FEMA has stated that the federal method used to regulate development of the special flood hazard areas would have to be reevaluated due to ongoing discrepancies which were on full display during the 2015 flood event. However, in due to form fashion it seems they cannot provide a final base flood elevation or BFE or a flood insurance rate map, FIRM, it can't be those updates.

Without the core sedimentation study and the hydraulic model. Funding the sedimentation survey would allow FEMA to do their job and thus further protect the people of Louisiana by completing updates to the BFE and the FIRM.

In addition to these studies, the Red River has several other immediate items which were in need of federal action and funding. I asked the committee to continue to work with me on the ongoing needs related to dredging, so that the river navigation for 24/7 industry can be maintained. These funding priorities will not only help protect constituents, but it will improve business development for opportunities not only for Louisiana, but also Texas and Arkansas.

Navigation funds through the core are truly needed to ensure and maintain a 9 by 200-foot channel. Without these businesses, will not only pick elsewhere to invest. Those that already have invested in North Louisiana will probably leave. The plan goal is to get a 12- foot river depth to ensure adequate competition with nearby rivers such as the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers.

The request for an investigation of change the authorized depth from a 9-foot to a 12-foot channel has been initiated repair for damage of buoys locks and levies along the Red River are also needed.

The construction features of J. Bennett Johnson Waterway project are only 93 percent complete. The Alexandria Front Dyke Reinforcement construction project and the JH Overton Lock and Dam to lower approach (ph) project. For example, the two that can compete for funding with a construction of general account resources for these projects and those who will help to aide in completion of the J. Bennett Johnson Waterway.

A final example of where navigation funds are needed is the Washitaw Black Rivers navigation project. Previously, the fiscal year 2017 budget request for the navigation project was 8.5 million and additional maintenance accounts funds would allow this project to compete for the additional funds necessary to keep the waterway open for commercial navigation in the next year.

Amount of time, I just want to strongly urge this subcommittee to invest in our ports and waterways, so that our local communities can continue to build vibrant economies and I stand ready to work with each of you and the administration and developing meaningful solutions to better maintain and enhance our nation and ask water infrastructure system. I am grateful for your time and your diligence on all these important needs.

SIMPSON:

Thank you. Mr. Johnson, I appreciate you being here today. Any questions?

KAPTUR:

Mr. Chairman I doubt that we don't have another witness right away, so I am just going to take 30 seconds to ...

SIMPSON:

OK.

KAPTUR:

Thanks Congressman Johnson very much, but to ask you if you have any theories about why the flood crest in 2015 was significantly higher than the flood crest in 1990. What's happening in your part of North America.

JOHNSON:

It is an excellent question and the subject of much conjecture in our district. The prevailing theory seems to be that sedimentation has settled on the bed of the river and that the Army Corps did not take that into account when they said that flood level. And so, it's a substantial rise. We have lots of sedimentation on the Red River and it's just built up overtime. And so, it was just something no one factored in apparently as crazy as that sounds and it was a gross underestimation that combined this flood with the flood that we had in South Louisiana several months later. We had the fourth most costly flood crisis in American history in our state and we're struggling to recover.

So ...

KAPTUR:

Getting more rainfall.

JOHNSON:

Let's hope not catastrophic levels.

KAPTUR:

I just want to say, are you getting more rainfall in shorter periods of time or larger volumes of rainfall, is that compared getting to the problem or not?

JOHNSON:

I don't know that that's been assessed to be the problem. I know there was a stored rainfall event in states just to our north and of course it flowed down to us. So, it wasn't even really the rainfall levels in Northwest Louisiana, they caught us those rainfalls in Missouri and Oklahoma and other areas and it just came to us.

But we're doing our best to prepare for future events and we are deeply concern, pun not intended that we could have a catastrophic event if these things happen again so.

SIMPSON:

Thank you. Thank you for being here today. We appreciate your testimony and we look forward to working with you and your staff.

JOHNSON:

Thank you so much.