

**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
November 9, 2005**

To adequately discuss what to legislate in order to deal with Louisiana's water resources needs, we should first pause and reflect on the past. The purchase of New Orleans, and subsequently Louisiana, was based on the need to trade the goods and crops of the Midwest to the rest of the world. It is no less important today. Today the goods traded through South Louisiana have become more valuable to the Midwest and other segments of the U.S. Its importance has increased because of energy, seafood, refineries and petrochemical plants.

In 1849 the federal government granted to Louisiana most of the federal land in Louisiana so that revenues from the use and sale of the land would produce an economy which could produce income to the federal Treasury. This proved to be beneficial to the federal government.

Again, after the 1927 flood the federal government provided legislation which resulted in reduced flooding, which has produced both improved navigation and flood protection. This, in turn, has led to one of the most important economic river corridors in the world, that which is located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

These important functions unintentionally led to increased threats from the tidal events and hurricanes by depriving the adjacent lands from the overflow of the river. Much of these lands, wetlands, marshes and ridges built and sustained by the river, have reverted to open water resulting in the loss of 2,000 square miles since 1930.

Although the loss of support from the river had been critical, oil exploration, navigation canals and other development have also made South Louisiana more susceptible to tidal events. This loss in the latter half of the last century has been occurring at approximately 25 to 35 square miles a year. Subsidence, the loss of elevation, has also affected South Louisiana. Some estimate a loss of three feet in elevation over the last 100 years. Since most of South Louisiana is below a 10 foot elevation above sea level, this has allowed the Gulf of Mexico closer to our communities.

Hurricane protection projects have been constructed and have protected communities from the effects of subsidence and coastal erosion. A more comprehensive approach would result in more security not only for South Louisiana, but the goods and services that South Louisiana provides for the country.

The platform which is South Louisiana is a working coast which produces energy, seafood, and trade which greatly benefits the United States. Investment by the United States should be considered because of what South Louisiana provides for the nation.

Economic justification should again convince Congress that investment in Louisiana will result in a positive return on its investment.

To invest properly and to insure the best return, the needed projects in flood protection, coastal restoration and navigation should be done in conjunction with each other and done quickly. To accomplish this, agencies like the Corps must streamline its procedures which cause delays, cost increases, and diminished results.

One of the reasons we have the human part of this natural disaster is loss of focus. Projects designed to mitigate the threat were ignored. We must design a position which has the capability on the local, state, and national level to involve the political leadership to work on issues which mitigate the risk from reoccurring natural disasters.

To build the necessary flood protection in a timely fashion, we must devise a system which is true to environmental laws, yet does not cause people to suffer, and communities to flood while waiting as the environmental community ponders and delays work. We must do better in building environmental projects which are agreed upon quickly, economically, and built to last. In most instances today, our environmental projects fall short in service to our people.

I mention money last because I believe changes must be made to reduce cost in order to build more protection, more efficiently. We must work as hard as possible to insure that that as much money as possible reaches contractors who will build well designed protection. Over studying, investigating and planning will not stop or reduce flood damage. Only physical barriers, levees, and environmental infrastructure will give people and communities a chance of surviving a hurricane.

We suggest that a funding stream based on a share of offshore oil revenues generated off the Louisiana coast would be the most reasonable approach to fund these projects. Some of the problems in South Louisiana have directly resulted from its support of the nation's energy needs. Most Americans would agree with the fairness of this approach. Most Americans will benefit from the proper attention to the flood problems of South Louisiana.

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