

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

### Oversight Hearing on Implementation of Corps of Engineers Water Resources Policies Senator Mary L. Landrieu Statement for the Record

February 7, 2013

I would like to first commend the Committee for holding this important hearing to highlight necessary and long overdue reforms to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps is tasked with wide range of missions, including flood control, restoration, and navigation, which are all vital to the State of Louisiana.

The current Corps processes are broken. The Corps spends millions of dollars on project studies that either do not result in construction due to lack of funds or are outdated almost immediately upon completion due to an inefficient and slow process. As you will hear from the Louisiana witnesses, the Corps New Orleans District has imposed wetlands mitigation requirements that have caused flood protection project costs to skyrocket. We must find a better way to combine mitigation with restoration and provide more reasonable solutions for flood protection projects.

While these reforms, and many others, are important, Congress faces an even greater problem, which is a dangerously insufficient investment in water resources infrastructure. Since 2008, the Corps' construction budget has been drastically reduced, yet the nation's backlog in unconstructed, authorized projects is at least \$40 billion. The FY12 construction budget was only \$1.7 billion for the entire country, and we could easily spend this amount in Louisiana alone.

This near halt in construction funding has dire consequences, and it is most concerning after what learned from Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Ike, and now Isaac in Louisiana – and Hurricane Sandy in the Northeast. Wise and timely investment in construction and proper maintenance can save lives and resources, and we are simply not currently making the necessary investments.

Despite this, the Corps' construction budget has not only been reduced, but has declined each year since Hurricane Katrina as a percentage of GDP. The most frustrating part about this is that the government is still paying, but instead of investing on the front end, we are chasing storms

and spending billions on disaster recovery. I can only wonder how many disasters it is going to take for enough of our colleagues to realize that this practice must change.

Fortunately, the recently passed Hurricane Sandy supplemental appropriations bill included some investment in mitigation against future damage, but it was not enough and because of the House's short-sighted vision, critical funding opportunities for Louisiana projects were stripped. In addition, this funding has to be offset, and inevitably as a result, the Corps budget will suffer even more. Another disaster will strike in the future, and we will be right back where we started.

I look forward to working with this Committee and the Committee on Appropriations to enact the necessary reforms and better funding solutions. Again, I thank the Committee for holding this hearing.