



News from the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II — Ranking Member

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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE NICK J. RAHALL, II, RANKING MEMBER HEARING ON “THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE AND FINANCIAL CHALLENGE OF RECAPITALIZING THE NATION’S INLAND WATERS AND TRANSPORT SYSTEM” SEPTEMBER 21, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Today’s hearing highlights the importance of robust investment in our nation’s infrastructure to the health and sustainability of our economy, and our overall quality of life.

I share the concerns expressed by several of the witnesses here this morning on the need to renew the Federal commitment to modernize our nation’s inland waterway system. The inland waterway system is critical for the efficient and economically-viable movement of bulk commodities, such as coal mined in the State of West Virginia, to market.

For example, in 2008, 74 million tons of bulk commodities (such as coal, petroleum, aggregates, and chemicals) were moved through the State of West Virginia – the majority of which was shipped along its river systems. Of this amount, over 57 million tons of coal moved along the river system in 2008, with an estimated value of over \$2.1 billion.

Unscheduled delays and inefficiencies in moving cargo along the inland system only serve to increase the costs of goods and services that either move on the inland system, or increase the costs to industries and companies that rely on these goods and services. Unfortunately, these increased costs are often passed along to American families at the grocery store or in other means. In my view, wise investments in ensuring the efficiency and reliability of our inland system can only benefit the bottom line of many American families.

Similarly, prudent investments in our nation’s infrastructure systems, in general, make wise economic sense. The Nation’s system of roads, bridges, and water-related infrastructure, including the inland waterways system, are needs that even Americans of vastly different political leanings agree deserve greater Federal investment – not less. After all, the jobs created by such investment are not Republican jobs or Democratic jobs – they are American jobs – and benefit the nation as a whole.

Over the past year, I have often expressed concern about the impacts of the proposed cuts to vital transportation and infrastructure spending programs advocated by the Republican leadership. In my view, these cuts are penny-wise and pound-foolish in terms of impacts to American families and our overall quality of life.

This is true, as well, for the cuts proposed by our Republican colleagues to the budget of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – which has weathered a dramatic cut of almost 20 percent in the current fiscal year, and is expected to be reduced even further for the upcoming fiscal year. These dramatic cuts to the nation’s premier water resources agency will have consequences – forcing the Corps to walk away from or delay the construction or maintenance of vital navigation, flood control, and environmental restoration projects that benefit the nation as a whole.

On the inland waterways system, these cuts will result in fewer critical construction and rehabilitation projects being funded at their capability – drawing out construction schedules and, inevitably, increasing the total costs of project delivery. This is unsustainable, and in my view, the wrong way to go. I look forward to continued debate on this issue here today.

I want to take the opportunity to especially welcome Michael Toohey, the President and CEO of the Waterways Council here this morning. Mike, thank you for coming here, and I look forward to hearing your and the rest of the witnesses testimony.

I yield back the balance of my time.