

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (CIVIL WORKS)**

**COMPLETE STATEMENT
OF**

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FOR THE HEARING BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ON
WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
WITHIN THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

18 JUNE 2002

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

I am Les Brownlee, the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. Thank you for inviting me here today. I'm privileged to appear before you on behalf of the Administration to talk with you about the Army Corps of Engineers, our Nation's water resources, and charting a path toward continued modernization of both.

I've learned a lot about the Corps since I assumed more direct management responsibilities for civil works in March. A piece of history that was interesting to me is how the Army got into civil works and water. After the War of 1812, both commercial development and national defense in the country required more reliable transportation arteries. Federal assistance, however, was slow in coming and was a "product of contentious congressional factions" and an Administration that did not want to meddle in the states' affairs. In the 1824 case of Gibbons vs. Ogden, however, the Supreme Court ruled that federal authority covered interstate commerce including riverine navigation. Shortly thereafter, the General Survey Act authorized the President to conduct a survey of nationally important roads and canals from a commercial, military or mail transportation point of view. The President gave that responsibility to the Army Corps of Engineers. About a month later, a second act appropriated \$75,000 for improving navigation along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers by removing sandbars, snags and other obstacles. The Corps was also tasked with that work, and so began the Corps of Engineers' continuous involvement in civil works and our Nation's water resources.

Since that time, the Corps has always been a dedicated servant of the American people. For 200 years, the Nation has relied on the Corps to help resolve some of our difficult problems. In addition to its water resources responsibilities, the Corps has

supported our military forces in time of war. The Corps provided the technical expertise for the Manhattan Project. Army engineers oversaw the building of the Panama Canal. The Kennedy Space Center and the Johnson Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston are products of Corps efforts. When a disaster strikes, Corps personnel in red jackets are there to help. Research work by the Corps resulted in building designs that saved lives in the Pentagon on September 11th. Today, 35,000 Corps employees work around the world to help improve the quality of life for people at home and abroad. We also want to ensure, as I'm sure you do, that this country can continue to rely on the capability, expertise and leadership of the Corps now, and in the future.

The distinguished history of the Army Corps of Engineers is the history of our Nation. As the Nation has changed its priorities and values, the Corps has also changed as it brought these priorities to reality.

It is with this history, tradition and spirit that I address the subject of today's hearing – Corps reform.

This Administration supports the goals of Corps reform and is willing to work with the Committee to eliminate unneeded water projects to pursue only those that are worthy; and to improve the ways in which we formulate projects and fund them. I therefore would propose that we focus our attention on the question that lies perhaps on a higher strategic plane: Where is our national policy regarding water resources heading next? Our continued understanding of this question is critical to setting the future direction of the Corps.

The people of America increasingly understand that our Nation's water resources are finite. The debate over its use classically centers around this question: Where should we give priority to the development of water resources for social and economic benefit and where should we give priority to the restoration of these resources to their natural state. Sometimes we must choose one over the other. Sometimes we struggle to do both. As science and engineering evolve, we can enhance our opportunity to find more balance between these options and, working together, make the right choices for the Nation.

We all agree that the Corps can and should modernize. But modernization of the Corps needs to be in accordance with the future direction of our national policy.

With your permission, I would like to give you my perspective on the water policy issue. Here are just a few of the facets of the issue.

Our society is growing more complex. We have competing interests and disputes in many watersheds—in the Everglades, along the Missouri River, the Mississippi River, the Columbia River, and many others. These interests and disputes are intensified when we experience drought conditions as severe as we have now over much of the country.

As members of this important committee, you are more aware than most that many Corps navigation projects have extensive maintenance and repair backlogs.

While advances in science and technology can move us toward a new paradigm of more environmentally sustainable projects and integrated water resources management, we must develop more effective public policies built on a new public consensus.

In terms of our Nation's priorities, the war on terrorism is, and should be, our main focus. We must prioritize our resources to ensure that we win this war. We must also ensure that we are looking out for the Nation's long term future and ensure that our country's economy remains strong. At the same time, we also need to protect and sustain our Nation's natural resources. Our financial resources are not unlimited. We therefore must address the following questions: What water resources investments do we most need to make now? To what extent should these be a Federal responsibility? To what extent should the Corps have this responsibility? Which investments should we not undertake until later? What can we do without? Should we continue all ongoing construction projects? Can we afford to build them all simultaneously? Should we continue to operate, maintain, and rehabilitate every investment that we have made in navigation?

This Administration has insisted on much stronger coordination, collaboration, and cooperation among agencies within the Executive Branch and wants to work more closely with you to collaborate more effectively on the plans and policies we should put in place to address these long-term needs.

I believe that it is important to focus our time and effort on such a debate at the national level. Corps reform is important. General Flowers and I agree that the Corps of Engineers should be changed and transformed to meet and better serve the evolving needs of the Nation, and General Flowers will address this in more detail. However, reform of the Corps will follow in a more natural and logical way if we better define our policies and reach agreement on the right balance on the critical priorities.

The Corps professionals' body of knowledge on water resources is unparalleled, and we must exploit that knowledge and associated skills to ensure that the Federal government can continue to meet the needs of its citizens.

I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to testify before this distinguished committee, recognizing that your knowledge of these subjects far exceeds what I have been able to learn in these past few months. I believe we have an opportunity, working together, to shape the Nation's future. As you know better than I, these are serious times and it is often hard to concentrate on the long term when the more immediate becomes urgent. I pledge to work with you on these important issues to achieve a national water policy that serves the best interest of all our citizens.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement, and I would be pleased to address any questions that you or the committee may have.