

Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Whitehouse: “*Water Resources Development Act of 2026: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Projects, Programs, and Priorities.*”

Thank you, Chairman, for the hearing today to discuss the Water Resources Development Act of 2026. Thank you, Assistant Secretary Telle, and Lieutenant General Graham, for appearing before the Committee. I wish we were convening under better circumstances.

ASA Telle, I supported your nomination. You committed to work collaboratively with this Committee to tackle our priorities and deliver the Corps’ missions to all American people.

Yet, communications between the Corps and congressional offices have been effectively shut down. Your office does not answer requests for information from my staff. Letters from members of this Committee receive no response. Questions for the Record from last September’s hearing remain unanswered.

As we convene today to discuss the Water Resources Development Act of 2026, your office has issued implementation guidance for just three of over 180 provisions in the Water Resources Development Act of 2024. This is ridiculous—when Congress passes a law, the relevant agency must move swiftly to implement it.

Most egregiously, in the seven months since the Senate confirmed your nomination, we have witnessed the worst politicization of the Corps of Engineers in modern times.

As with other federal agencies, the Corps’ permitting processes have been corrupted to stymie safe, affordable renewable energy, to help out the President’s big fossil fuel donors.

Wielding the permitting authority granted to the agency by Congress in this manner violates the law and contravenes the Corps’ own regulations, which state that it is neither a proponent nor an opponent of any permit proposal.

You have announced an unprecedented pause on \$11 billion in funding for Corps studies and projects in Rhode Island and 11 other states represented by Democrats in the Senate—including six other members of this Committee—for the reason according to Russell Vought that we are Democrats.

This is an attack not only on the opposition party but on our Nation’s coasts.

Annual funding for inland flood projects has long outpaced funding for coastal projects, by 20 to 1, even 100 to 1. Instead of addressing this problem, you made things worse by pausing work on large-scale nonstructural flood risk projects, the vast majority of which protect coastal

areas. With our coasts facing severe increases in flood risk from rising sea levels and worse storms, it's just wrong for you to so disfavor coastal areas.

A rumored Administration proposal to fund inland waterways projects off the backs of coastal ports—by significantly increasing the Harbor Maintenance Tax and merging the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund with the Inland Waterways Trust Fund—worsens the Corps' reputation as the bureaucratic tributary of the Mississippi River, with no regard for coasts.

The U.S. economy relies on global trade through our coastal ports. You should not be party to Administration schemes that would jeopardize our country's long-term economic security to harm coastal states as retribution for not bowing to the President's will.

It is hard to imagine what your theory is pursuing a bill that requires bipartisan support to pass. A hard, fast and convincing course correction is required to get yourselves on track. Remember that you lead the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, not the Donald J. Trump Corps of Engineers.