Statement
Senator James M. Inhofe
Markup
S. 2848, the Water Resources Development Act of 2016

Today we are demonstrating that the Environment and Public Works Committee can get things done. We are marking up consensus legislation to address both water resources development needs and drinking water and clean water infrastructure needs.

We have held four hearings on the issues addressed in S. 2848. We had two hearings on navigation, flood control and ecosystem restoration projects and two hearings on drinking water and wastewater needs and solutions. Members of the Committee came forward with their ideas on how to address the issues we heard about in those hearings. Our bill reflects those recommendations and priorities.

In our February 10th hearing we heard from the sponsors and users of our water transportation infrastructure – including the director of the Port of Catoosa -- that we need to empower local sponsors to help keep that infrastructure strong and functioning.

- S. 2848 addresses that issue:
  We have removed barriers to let project sponsors get things done –using their own money.
    - This includes letting ports like the Port of Catoosa help maintain navigation infrastructure so locks don't shut down due to lack of maintenance, costing shippers millions in delay time.
    - We are streamlining the process for allowing local sponsors make changes to federal projects so levee districts are not caught up in a bureaucratic nightmare when they try to fix their levees and drought stricken communities can increase reservoir storage capacity.
    - We also let local levee districts increase the level of flood protection – at their expense –so we don't waste federal dollars rebuilding the same inadequate levee over and over.
    - WRDA 2016 also expands the current authority for the Corps to accept funds from non-Federal interests to expedite permits for rail transportation projects.

At our March 16 hearing we heard from the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Engineers, about projects the Corps has developed to meet our water resources development needs.

- S. 2848 authorizes 27 Chiefs Reports.
    - These include important harbor deepening projects for Charleston, SC and Jacksonville, FL, as well as significant flood protection projects in Kansas, Missouri, California, and elsewhere.

- We also are authorizing the next phase of the Everglades restoration project that Senator Rubio has championed.

At our April 7 hearing on keeping water and wastewater infrastructure affordable, we heard how communities are struggling to meet ever-growing Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act mandates and need flexibility and targeted assistance.

- S. 2848 addressees these issues

We have provided federal assistance to communities facing affordability concerns. As our witness representing Rural Water – Mr. Robert Moore from Madill Oklahoma – recommended, we targeted the grant assistance to where it is needed the most. These programs include:

- Assistance for small and disadvantaged communities with a priority for underserved communities
- Assistance for lead service line replacement with a priority for disadvantaged communities
- Assistance to address sewer overflows

We also have empowered local communities to meet EPA mandates on the schedule that will be affordable and address the greatest health threats first.

- We made sure communities can meet their regulatory requirements in permits, rather than through enforcement actions and orders so EPA won't have a gun to a community's head.
- We made sure that EPA updates its financial affordability guidance and stops using median household income as its only indicator of residential affordability. EPA's current practice forces a people to spend money until half of the community is paying more than 2% of household income on their sewer bills. Under S. 2848, EPA will have to look at impacts on real, individual families, not a hypothetical median.

In providing disaster relief for Flint Michigan, we also have capitalized the new Water Infrastructure Financing Innovation Act program which can provide secured loans for water and wastewater infrastructure anywhere in the country. The $70 million provided in the bill for this new program can provide as much as $4.2 billion in secured loans – a fiscally responsible way to provide federal assistance.

At our April 20 hearing on innovative technologies, we heard how new technologies can help address drought and other water supply needs – like the issues we face on the Red River in Oklahoma.

- S. 2848 addresses this issue by promoting new technologies and the transfer of desalination technologies from other countries addressing the same problems.

Finally S. 2848 provides tools to address significant risks with a new dam safety program implemented by FEMA.

I am very proud of this legislation and I look forward to moving it all the way through the legislative process.