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Committee on Environment
and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

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OVERSIGHT OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Wednesday, September 17, 2025

United States Senate

Committee on Environment and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:16 a.m. in room 562, Dirksen Senate Office Building, the Honorable Shelley Moore Capito [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Senators Capito, Whitehouse, Cramer, Sullivan, Ricketts, Boozman, Merkley, Padilla.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, A UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Senator Capito. All right, here we go. I am calling this hearing to order, and welcome our witnesses. Thank you so much. I apologize for the delay.

I also want to congratulate Adam Telle on his recent confirmation. Hanging by a thread, there, Adam, until the very end, but you made it across the finish line in our final vote in August.

Today we will conduct oversight of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works program and examine the agency's implementation of prior Water Resources Development Acts. Since 2014, this committee has kept to a biannual schedule of passing this bipartisan legislation and we look forward to keeping on track with that record.

WRDA authorizes water resource studies and projects and sets national priorities for our civil works program. The Corps does critical work across the Nation through its navigation, flood risk management and ecosystem restoration missions. This work protects the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans, facilitates commerce throughout our Country and internationally.

So the timely implementation of these laws, consistent with Congressional intent, is essential. The Corps is actively

working on a number of studies and projects that I am going to mention, because they are critically important to my State of West Virginia.

The Lower Mud River Flood Risk Management project in Milton, West Virginia, has been a priority of mine. In WRDA 2022, I was able to increase the Federal share of that project from 65 percent to 90 percent. This change brought in the support we needed without creating financial strain on our State.

In 2023, I also secured an additional $190 million for this project, bringing the total to $287 million in Federal funding, delivering on the Federal side of the funding equation to make this project happen. Last month, West Virginia signed an amendment to the project partnership agreement to formalize the new cost sharing agreement which allows the project to resume.

Secretary Telle, thank you for being there, I know that was your first visit in your new official position, and I thank you for joining us in Milton for that ceremony.

The State of West Virginia recently committed to matching the Federal funds that I have secured for the Upper Guyandotte and Kanawha River Basin Flood Risk Management studies. Just over nine years ago, in June 2016, West Virginia experienced flooding at historic rates, leading to tragic deaths and devastation.

The Kanawha River Basin study is a direct response to this flooding. I championed a provision in WRDA 2024 that increases the Federal cost share for future projects identified by this study.

WRDA 2024 also increased the ability of the Corps to carry out smaller projects for debris and obstruction removal, which is critical to reducing the severity of flooding in many areas of I am sure everybody's State, but particularly ours.

The fifth and final phase of the Bluestone Dam Safety Assurance Mega-Project, in the City of Hinton, continues to make significant progress. In September of 2024, Hurricane Helene led to high water levels in rivers and streams across the east coast, well beyond the areas hit directly by the storm. The New River was among those affected and resulted in historic water levels against the Bluestone Dam.

The dam was able to withstand the rising waters and prevented an estimated $577 million in damages. Once completed, the project will protect more than 150,000 people and $20 billion worth of infrastructure.

Unfortunately, there is more to be done. This year alone, several parts of West Virginia experienced devastating flooding. In February, flooding in McDowell County resulted in the loss of lives and necessitated major rescue and recovery efforts. The damage wiped out the only route to the Welch Community Hospital,

and caused major infrastructure issues in Wyoming and Mingo counties.

Ohio and Marion counties also experienced significant damage and loss of lives following flash flooding on the Father's Day weekend. My Congressional colleagues and I supported Governor Morrisey's requests for presidential disaster declarations, and I am grateful to President Trump for his approval of these requests.

I will continue to work with the Corps and local government officials to determine if additional authorities are needed to help mitigate the impacts from future flood events.

Thank you again to the witnesses for being here. I now turn to my Ranking Member, Ranking Member Whitehouse, for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Senator Capito follows:]

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, A UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Senator Whitehouse. Thank you, Chairman, for this hearing today. Thank you, Secretary Telle and Lieutenant General Graham, for appearing.

As you know, one of my most vexing problems, one the Corps has refused to remedy, is chronic underfunding of coastal storm risk management projects. For my Ocean State, that is a bad situation.

While flood risk is on the rise nationwide, coastal areas face the most severe increases due to rising sea levels and more frequent extreme rainfall events. In First Street's National Flood Risk Assessment, coastal cities outrank inland cities by all measures of substantial flood risk.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has determined that the share of properties exposed to flood risk in coastal communities is more than twice that of inland communities, and coastal communities are projected to see even sharper increases in flood risk over the next two decades.

Greater flood and storm risks are, in turn, contributing to a property insurance crisis that threatens to trash our entire economy. When risk makes property uninsurable, the property also becomes unmortgageable. Without mortgages, property markets crash. And as we all saw in 2008, when property markets

crash, so does the economy.

Despite this dire situation, coastal storm risk management projects year after year receive between 20 and 100 times less funding than inland flood risk management projects. That simply isn't good enough. The Corps needs to tackle problems like this one head-on and embrace reform.

Assistant Secretary Telle, I supported your nomination and confirmation because I know you understand and appreciate the critical role that Congressional oversight plays in ensuring that Federal agencies deliver for people. I value your commitment to maintaining an open line of communication with Senator Capito and me, and particularly appreciate your willingness to engage with committee staff on a regular basis to keep the Corps accountable.

In prior testimony before this Committee, you spoke of your formative experience helping to secure funding and resources for the State of Mississippi's recovery from the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina. And you know from experience managing the FEMA portfolio for the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee that disasters do not differentiate between red and blue States.

Under your leadership, I expect to remove the political bias so blatant in the Corps' Fiscal Year 2025 Construction Work Plan, which shifted over $250 million in construction funding

from blue states to red States, completely eliminating funding for four critical California flood risk management projects to fund navigation projects in Texas that did not even make the cut in the Corps' Fiscal Year 2025 budget.

Assistant Secretary Telle, I expect you to put an end to it. Egregious partisanship does not serve the Army Corps, and it does not serve the American people.

I also expect to see progress on project delivery. Cost escalations and delays are pervasive, recurring issues in the Corps' civil works construction program. The Trump administration's attacks on the Federal workforce have only made addressing these problems worse.

In just a few months, DOGE's deferred resignation program and voluntary early retirement have hollowed out Corps offices, so that across the agency, workforce reductions undermine mission execution. Some Corps district offices have lost as much as 20 percent of their staff, and all have likely lost expert personnel. The prolonged Trump hiring freeze is exacerbating the staffing shortage.

As a result of this DOGE-driven chaos, Corps offices are either deferring work, contracting it out at a higher cost, or paying employees overtime to complete it, all while continuing to pay salaries to employees who, under the DRP, no longer report for duty.

This is not just a matter of workforce morale; the DRP has actually jeopardized mission-critical operations and increased project costs.

Assistant Secretary Telle, General Graham, you have your work cut out for you. I look forward to working with you and hope that you will acknowledge the challenges, roll up your sleeves, and work cooperatively with this Committee to address them.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[The prepared statement of Senator Whitehouse follows:]

Senator Capito. Thank you.

Our first witness is the 14th Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Adam Telle. Secretary Telle, as I mentioned in my opening statement, was recently confirmed to serve in this role by the Senate in a bipartisan vote.

Prior to his confirmation, Mr. Telle spent two decades in public service, with roles in the U.S. Senate, notably as my clerk for the Homeland Security Subcommittee, and as a special assistant to the President in the first Trump administration.

Welcome, Secretary Telle. Again, thank you for visiting West Virginia. You are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ADAM TELLE, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY FOR CIVIL WORKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CIVIL WORKS

Mr. Telle. Thank you, Chairman Capito.

Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Army Civil Works program. I am honored to serve as the 14th Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works and as President Trump's, Secretary Hegseth's, and Secretary Driscoll's top official responsible for overseeing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' civil works mission.

I was nominated by President Trump on March 24th of this year, appeared at a hearing in May, and I was confirmed by the Senate, as Chairman Capito pointed out, on August 2nd. I began work in this role immediately thereafter and have been on the job for six and a half weeks. During this time, I have been working alongside General Graham and his team to ensure that the Army Civil Works program is positioned to deliver on President Trump's vision for our Country and on its critical mission, which this committee has had an important role in defining.

As I said during the consideration of my nomination before this committee, I am honored to help lead the Army Civil Works mission. It touches small and large communities throughout the

Country, and very few government agencies' missions capture the interests of American citizens, landowners, communities, States, job creators, and the representatives here in Washington quite like this one.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers originated in 1775, before the Declaration of Independence was even signed. The America we know today developed, in large part, as a result of the work of the Corps.

Congress has given the Corps two main missions in addition to its original navigation mission: flood damage reduction and ensuring the future availability of our aquatic resources. Because the Civil Works program is important to the American public and their elected representatives here in Washington, during my first weeks, I have been working to establish greater consistency and accountability across the four layers of this enterprise, which consist of my office and the Corps headquarters, divisions and districts.

I intend to spend my time in this job ensuring that the Corps carries out its missions to benefit the American public as effectively, as quickly, and as efficiently as possible. We must optimize our program for quality, speed, and cost if we want to do our part to protect lives and commerce as President Trump is delivering on his vision to ensure that the United States remains the greatest nation in the history of the world

during the 21st Century.

Our partners here on Capitol Hill, and particularly on this Committee, have been pivotal in supporting this enterprise, and I request your partnership as I work with General Graham to ensure the Civil Works program evolves to become more efficient and consistent to meet our modern demands. To deliver against that workload, we must work in partnership with the Congress, throughout the Executive Branch, and with our stakeholders to drive efficiency, collaboration, and results in an environment that is necessarily resource-constrained.

In addition to driving more efficiency into the Civil Works program, we must continue to lift the Federal regulatory burden on the public. This Administration is committed to ending the last five decades of confusing and ever-changing definitions of the term "Waters of the United States" under the Clean Water Act of 1972.

Together with Administrator Zeldin and President Trump's Environmental Protection Agency, the Army has already issued guidance that follows the Supreme Court's Sackett decision, and we will move quickly to issue a permanent definition that follows the post-Sackett law of the land, reduces red tape, cuts overall permitting costs, lowers the cost of doing business in communities across the Country and continues to protect America's waters.

In July, my office made much-needed changes to our National Environmental Policy Act implementing procedures that will reform, modernize, and expedite the Corps' environmental reviews, eliminate unnecessary delays, and help ensure the growth of highly cost effective, reliable infrastructure projects across the Nation.

We also recognize the opportunities provided through WRDA 2024 and previous WRDAs, which this committee has had such an important role in shaping. These efforts were intended to address navigation, reservoir management, the beneficial use of dredged material and many other issues.

I look forward to gaining insight today about your views and interests, so that together, we can serve America's vital infrastructure needs.

Thank you, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse and the members of this Committee. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Telle follows:]

Senator Capito. Thank you, Secretary Telle. Appreciate that opening statement.

Next we will hear from Lieutenant General William H. Graham, Jr., the 56th Chief of Engineers and Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. General Graham assumed these duties last September after serving as the Corps' Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations. As Commanding General, he is responsible for over 30,000 civilian employees and 800 military personnel in more than 110 countries.

General Graham, really, welcome, thank you for serving, thank you for being here. We look forward to your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL WILLIAM H. GRAHAM, JR., 56TH CHIEF OF ENGINEERS AND COMMANDING GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

General Graham. Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, members of the Committee, I am very honored to testify before you today in regard to oversight of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works program and implementation of the Water Resources Development Acts.

Through the Civil Works Program, the Army Corps works our partners to study, build and operate water resource projects focusing on our three main mission areas of commercial navigation, flood and storm damage reduction, and aquatic ecosystem restoration. Let me break those down.

The navigation program, which consists of our coastal and Great Lakes channels, as well as the inland rivers and inter-coastal waterways, underpins much of the national economy, ensuring that commodities can move reliably and efficiently. Our flood and storm reduction program maintains 746 dams, over 13,000 miles of Federal levees and 450 miles of shore protection. Those systems provide, on average, a staggering $200 billion per year of flood damages avoided.

To continuously maintain and improve these mission areas, I certainly want to thank this committee, as was mentioned by the Chairman, for supporting the Corps' Civil Works program with

your commitment, since 2014, to passing biannual Water Resources Development Acts. Those acts have provided us with the authorities necessary to address the changing needs of the Nation's water resources infrastructure.

WRDA 2024 advanced the Corps' principal civil works missions by authorizing new navigation, flood risk management, coastal storm risk management, and aquatic ecosystem restoration studies and projects all across the Country. These studies and projects, when funded, will strengthen the supply chain, better protect Americans from flooding and improve degraded aquatic environments.

We deeply value the authorities you have entrusted to us. Our pledge is to put them to work to deliver for the American people. To that end, the Army Corps' objective every day is to safely deliver quality projects on schedule within budget. We measure this closely. Our scheduled delivery, our current on-schedule rate when I checked this morning was 80.4 percent. That is a low, low, low B. And that is unacceptable.

This performance is influenced by factors we can control and factors such as inflation that we don't control. So focusing on those things that we can control, the Army Corps is absolutely committed to procedural improvements, as Mr. Telle spoke about, in the following three areas.

First, we have to get the engineering right. Focus here is

on the majority of the designs. We will not request authority to build new projects unless the design is advanced enough that we truly understand what we are proposing to build. That threshold is usually around the 35 percent level. We have not been doing that in the past.

There are some nuances on how we need to work to break down large, complex projects and there are some nuances on cost-sharing of studies vice cost-sharing of construction. And we are committed to working through those nuances with this committee.

But fundamentally, fundamentally, we need to better understand what it is we are proposing to build before we ask you for authority to build it.

The second thing, we have to get the project management right. Here we are focusing on crafting logical, fully-resourced schedules and sticking to them, ensuring that we are delivering these important projects with a great sense of urgency, or as General Kelly puts it, hustle. If we stay on schedule, then we are likely to stay on budget.

Third thing, we have to get the team right. We are striving to bring together the right mix of talent with either onboard manning or leveraging the incredible talents in the private sector.

So in closing, the path to successful delivery is clear:

plan projects thoroughly, fund them efficiently; and build them rapidly with the right team of master builders. I look forward to working with this committee to stay on that path.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to addressing your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Graham follows:]

Senator Capito. Thank you, General. Appreciate it.

I will kick us off to the first question for Secretary Telle. Many provisions provided in prior WRDAs have gone largely un-implemented. Section 1102 of WRDA 2024 requires that your office develop and submit a plan to Congress on the implementation of not just WRDA 2024, but prior WRDAs. This plan must identify provisions that will require implementation guidance or appropriations.

So my first question is, when can we expect the list of WRDA 2024 provisions to be finalized?

Mr. Telle. Senator Capito, thank you for the question, Chairman Capito.

My office and I know General Graham's under his leadership with the Corps of Engineers takes very seriously the work of this committee. I am committed to following the provisions in WRDA, following the law. This committee has expressed frustration over the speed of implementation of the laws that you have enacted. And as you point out, Chairman Capito, we owe you a plan about how to get that done.

Each of these provisions is different. I believe the number in the WRDA 2024 was approximately 180-plus provisions that we were working to implement. Some of them are straightforward and easy to implement. Some of them require implementation guidance, as you point out. And we have made

determinations about which are straightforward enough to implement and which require implementation guidance.

I will just say that it would be helpful to work with you to identify provisions that we can address without triggering a large interagency process. If we can get the information to you that you need to do your job, we will be happy to work with you on doing that.

Senator Capito. So, I am asking if you have a date of when you would put your plan forward with all this implementation. My understanding is in 2024, we required you to submit to us a plan, correct?

Mr. Telle. Yes, ma'am, that is correct.

Senator Capito. Do you have a date when you will have that to us?

Mr. Telle. Senator, I don't have, I am not prepared to give you a specific date today. All I can tell you is that --

Senator Capito. Is that because it is 180 provisions and some that are more complicated than others? Or is it because -- why is that?

Mr. Telle. Senator, at the heart of it is that the Article II branch of government is led by a chief executive. And many of the provisions included in WRDA 2024 implicate agencies and equities across the government.

In order to speak with one Executive Branch voice and give

you an answer that is correct, it necessarily involves coordination with a myriad of agencies that complicates our ability to get you the information you need so that we can speak with one Executive Branch voice. Given that that provision implicates a number of provisions that implicate other agencies, it is complex for us to deliver to you something that you can count on that is right.

But I am committed to doing that.

Senator Capito. Well, that is important, I think, obviously, for us to have it included in that WRDA 2024, that plan is important to us.

General Graham, on the cost overrun issues, this is just a consistently huge issue. We included several provisions intended to provide the Corps with more time and resources to better study possible solutions, the needs that might be in the front end, and you sort of mentioned this. Our intent was for the agency to then spend less time reworking project plans after they have been authorized for construction.

However, we do not want these provisions to be interpreted as directives from Congress to the Corps to go back to the days when the agency spent years or decades studying a single project.

What additional steps are being taken to address these costs overruns? You addressed this a little bit in your opening

statement, but if you could get a deeper dive on that.

General Graham. Chairman Capito, thank you for that question. Every time we don't deliver a project on schedule, I get an email from the district engineer who explains what happened. Then we have some very pointed discussions on what was the root cause. The vast majority of the root causes are, we didn't know enough, as I spoke to in my opening statement, about the project before we asked you to authorize it.

Probably a good way to visualize that is, a lot of those authorizations were kind of at the conceptual 10 percent level. They weren't at the 35 percent. So basically, hey, we authorized a house, not a four-bedroom house with a gas heater and three bedrooms. And that is what is tripping us up.

Digging down into the details a little bit more, the main thing we missed is the field investigations. So we didn't get all the survey data that we needed. So we didn't know, this is a water resource business we are in, so those elevations, those are kind of critical.

And same thing goes with, well, what property is associated with those surveys? And what does the soil look like that we are going to build upon? Kind of fundamental stuff. And we didn't know nearly enough of it.

So we are working with Secretary Telle to come up with a commonsense reason or rationale for moving this forward.

Senator Capito. My time is running out here, but I would ask, do you envision, then, going back on pending projects and redoing this? Or is this from going forward, this is the way you are going to do it on new projects?

General Graham. Certainly going forward. Projects that have been authorized but we haven't built those yet, the designs on those are still sitting probably around the 10 percent level. It would be helpful to be able to open those up, take a look at those, and then, when Congress and the administration are looking to fund those projects, I can give you a realistic cost estimate.

Senator Capito. Okay. All right.

Senator Whitehouse?

Senator Whitehouse. Thank you very much, Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you both for being here.

My coastal risk management concern is exemplified in the President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget, which has $1.56 billion for the Corps construction account with only $2 million recommended for coastal storm risk management. I have talked about a 20 to 1 ratio, I have talked about a 100 to 1 ratio, this is an 80 to 1 ratio.

If you drill down on that one, on the $2 million, you find that it actually won't even fund a single project. It is for employee compensation claims to the Department of Labor.

So that to me nets out to zero coastal storm risk management projects in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. What are we going to do about this?

Mr. Telle. Senator Whitehouse, you and I have discussed this previously on several occasions. It is something that I have looked into in my six and a half weeks here on the job. You and I should compare numbers. The numbers I have for Fiscal Year 2026 President's budget are different than yours. I just want to make sure we are speaking from the same facts.

What I will say about the overall ratio that you just -- go ahead.

Senator Whitehouse. Give me the name of the person on your team my team should talk to to go through the numbers before we have this conversation.

Mr. Telle. Absolutely. Your team works very closely with Stacey Brown.

Senator Whitehouse. Stacey Brown it is. Go ahead.

Mr. Telle. Senator Whitehouse, one of the things that I wanted to point out to you in looking through these numbers is that the vast majority of construction and investigation funding goes toward rehabilitating our dams. These are dams that were built over the decades that protect American cities from flood risk. They hold water back from flooding those cities. A large portion of the President's budget request is related to

maintaining and rehabilitating those dams that are of a critical safety level.

When you look at the new projects that are not dam-related, and investigations and construction, the ratio that you are discussing is more like 1.7 to 1, inland to coastal. And so I just want to point out that when we are taking action to rehabilitate infrastructure that is in desperate need of it based on the safety implications, the President's budget has prioritized those activities, and it does skew the numbers.

But I want to make sure that you understand those aren't new dams, those are dams that are in our inventory and have been for, in many cases, decades.

Senator Whitehouse. Yes. And were it not for this discrepancy, there would probably be a lot of coastal projects that would have been in your inventory for decades. But because they were overlooked, they are not in your inventory for decades. So it is a continuing problem, and I look forward to working with you to find a sensible solution.

Mr. Telle. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Whitehouse. You have indicated that you are pausing work on feasibility studies for non-structural solutions. That is Army Corps speak for what, non-structural?

Mr. Telle. Senator, thank you for asking the question. I think in the case that you are discussing, non-structural refers

to an activity that doesn't, is not in keeping with the Corps' long tradition of building infrastructure that protects entire communities, but rather going home by home and in many cases --

Senator Whitehouse. Rehabilitating homes would be an example of that?

Mr. Telle. Correct. And I would say at scale is a key part of this conversation. Because we are not talking about a project where we provide some piece of flood control infrastructure and then for the few homes that are still in harm's way, we elevate them. We are talking about going into entire regions and using the United States Army Corps of Engineers to go and home by home elevate.

I think, as I discussed with you yesterday, I think based on the initial results of some of this work at scale, we need to have a conversation about whether this is how you would like for the United States Army Corps of Engineers to dedicate its efforts.

Senator Whitehouse. Well, first of all, let me say that I am eager for that discussion. I think there are other interests that could be brought to bear having to do with the National Flood Insurance Program. There is a lot of messy work that has not been done about protecting our coasts and it is not clear that you coming in and doing all of it is the best solution.

But neither is it the best solution to have you just walk

away. And I have the example here of Louisiana's large-scale non-structural project of $600 million to raise 3,462 homes across a 4,700 square mile study area, which is a pretty big project and $600 million is pretty serious money, even for the Army Corps.

But if you put that next to the Ike Dike in Texas, the budget for that is closing on $60 billion. So it is 100 times more expensive to do the Ike Dike project. You could do 100 of those Louisiana projects. I think in that context it is important that we come to a sensible commonsense solution and not one that just says, okay, non-structural is all done here.

Mr. Telle. Senator, I agree with you. And I want to make very clear, General Graham's team's directive to take a harder look at the non-structural program has not slowed work on the two pilot projects in Louisiana and New York, the one that you referenced.

However, I would just say that the early results that I have been made aware of of that program would cause the cost to escalate far beyond the $600 million amount that you referenced. And quite frankly, I believe if we didn't take a second look at this, we would be being called before this committee for waste, you know, inefficiently using taxpayer dollars.

So I think your willingness to work with us to get this, we don't want to walk away from non-structural solutions and will

always analyze them as alternatives. The question is whether the United States Army Corps of Engineers is the appropriate entity to implement them.

Senator Whitehouse. I think I can safely say that both the Chair and I would like to work with you to get to a sensible solution that is not no more non-structural. Thank you.

Senator Capito. Thanks.

Senator Cramer?

Senator Cramer. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses, to both of you.

Let me start out, Mr. Assistant Secretary, by thanking you. In WRDA 2024, we passed the bill, or the law that required, required, required the Army to form the Western Water Cooperation Committee. Added two-plus years of stalling. Oh, by the way, it was due in 90 days after we passed it, or after it was implemented.

You stepped in and it got done. I appreciate that. Because that is part of what we are talking about. Many of these things we are talking about don't require, with all due respect, a brand new elevation report. The land has been the same for a long, long time. But just forming a committee, thank you for doing that. It means a lot to me that you stepped up and did that.

And on the topic we discussed a little bit, generally

speaking, the administration has embraced doing more with less, being more efficient with the people's money. Not just throwing personnel and dollars after every challenge, as though somehow that is going to magically fix things. It is a breath of fresh air. And I am fully supportive of it.

In the past, especially with the Corps, something we have heard a lot is, we just don't have enough staff to do things. So, we give them a whole bunch more staff, and so that means more lawyers get to read the same thing over and over, more engineers get to look at the same thing over and over, and stall longer with regard to the law.

I think the smarter approach is streamlining things and eliminating unneeded regulations and ultimately reducing the workload, not just the workforce, but your workload.

Specifically, Mr. Secretary, with regard to the Corps, do you believe that pre-COVID staffing levels are adequate to deliver a lot of the things you are hearing about today and the task in front of you?

Mr. Telle. Senator Cramer, thank you for the question. Thank you for working with us on the Western Water Committee.

I agree with you that a larger bureaucracy doesn't necessarily mean better results for the American taxpayer. As you intelligently point out, the staffing levels within the United States Army Corps of Engineers mirror the staffing levels

of the United States Army Corps of Engineers prior to the pandemic.

I believe that with modern technology, with better forms of cooperation with our non-Federal sponsors, I think about the project in Fargo, in your State, I think we can deliver more to the American taxpayers with a staff that looks a whole lot like the staff prior to the pandemic.

And so thank you for addressing that. I think that answered your question.

Senator Cramer. Thank you for addressing it.

Like I said, let's reduce the workload along with the workforce, because it seems to me there is a lot of redundancy. In fact, I mean, just listening to the discussion a little bit ago, well, throughout the morning, I find it frustrating that years go by, I mean, with regard to just one example in North Dakota, noxious weeds. WRDA 2020, over five years ago I passed a law that requires a report on how to deal with noxious weeds.

I hear over and over from landowners that border Corps land, it is over three years late, the report. In other words, they are never going to do it. I am sure it is in some well-intentioned bureaucrat's pile.

But the law didn't say, get around to it when you can. And what I was going to say about the nuance of things, when in doubt, obey the law. It is not -- you know, I don't call my

wife if I get picked up for speeding to see what I should do about it. I slow down. You know, our laws are not arbitrary, they are not open-ended, they are just, do your best.

So a report on noxious weeds, and noxious weeds is a good example. I am glad you brought up technology. Because the farmers that farm the land right next to Corps land know exactly how to do it. You could just have a cup of coffee with the guy next door and they would tell you exactly how to get rid of the noxious weeds in a safe manner, because guess what? The farmers make a living off that land. They are not even just doing it because the government told them they should. They are doing it because they have to feed a hungry world and they know how to do it.

So let's default to yes and that is what I appreciate about you, Mr. Secretary. You default to what is possible, how do we do the possible. Okay, that is the law. How creative can we get within the law to get to yes? And the default of the Corps for decades has been no, we can't do that, even though the law says you have to do that.

So maybe I will just, General, if you want to speak a minute or two about the noxious weed issue. I don't know how familiar you are with it. But really, it is now over three years late, that report. Why is that?

General Graham. Senator Cramer, I believe that report, as

you kind of alluded to, is still under administration review.

But we absolutely want to be great neighbors with our partners up there and leverage every bit of local knowledge that we have, with the farmers out there, with the tribes out there, so that we can steward this land for the American people to the best of our ability.

Senator Cramer. Okay, good. Let's just give more of it back to the tribes and the farmers and they can steward it really, really well.

Senator Capito. Senator Merkley?

Senator Merkley. Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you both for your partnership on so many important infrastructure questions or challenges in the west.

In Coos Bay, the stakeholders are working to establish the first ship-to-rail container port on the U.S. west coast. And you all have been serving as the point for the permitting process for the channel modification and for coordinating with other Federal agencies in upgrading the terminal and modernizing the railroad line.

This is an incredible opportunity to add to our ability to move freight in a cost-effective fashion. It keeps trucks off the road and enables us in a growing, interdependent world to get products to market, supply chains to be effective.

So I appreciate that very much, and I appreciate your

operation and efforts on the hatcheries. When the dams were built, there was a promise made that these dams will be accompanied by efforts to make sure the fish runs continue. Those kind of go close to our heart and our soul in the west. So incredibly important. And of course, the dredging projects that involve various ports.

So, three questions that I am going to get to here, a minute apiece. So it will be kind of rapid fire.

First, it has been three years since I met with the Corps down at the Cole Rivers Hatchery. And it became very clear that the biggest challenge there was the supply of clean water, and basically the answer was, we need a pipeline that goes further up the river to bring in cleaner water, we need a better filtration system.

And this hatchery supplies not only to the fish runs on the Rogue, but also on the Umpqua, also a whole series of lakes in terms of trout. Incredibly important.

In those three years, we have gotten an electric line and six roofs. To me, that is a one-year project. Meanwhile, we are nowhere close to getting the water supply, which is the critical, essential heart of the hatchery challenge, because they have had a number of losses of different groups of fish as a result of contaminated water.

How can we expedite the completion of the renovation of

this essential hatchery?

Mr. Telle. Senator Merkley, thank you for the question, and understanding the rapid fire request, I would just say, we agree with you completely on the need to increase our U.S. port capacity for competitiveness in the 21st century.

With regard to the fish hatchery questions that you raised, I will defer to General Graham on the details of the progress there. But I would just say that in my review of this issue it is clear that there are a number of equities implicated, including hydropower and other interests in your State.

So I would defer to General Graham on the complicated nature of this challenge.

General Graham. Senator Merkley, thank you for that question. We understand the challenges at Cole River. The design for that water treatment improvements that you spoke to is at 85 percent as I checked yesterday. And the additional substation electrical work, the funding is on hand to do that for a 2026 award.

But when I talked to the Portland District about all of the fish hatcheries that we own that others run, they are all of, if I had to give them a letter grade, they are all about a C minus, D plus. So the direction I gave the division command up there is, we need to come up with a long-term capital reinvestment strategy in those hatcheries.

Senator Merkley. Thank you, and I will just keep pressing, because this was the deal on the dams, that the hatcheries would be a very effective complementary component. And watching them deteriorate and in many places be unable to fulfill the responsibilities that they have is extremely disturbing. It is not just an environmental issue, it is an economic issue for our commercial fisheries, for our sports fisheries, but just for our whole connection to the ecosystem in the west.

So I will keep pressing, and thank you. I just don't think it should take years to do new roofs and electrical cable. And it shouldn't take forever to design, redesign, and the 85 percent you referred to, the design work just seems to go on forever. It is like one can always visit and revisit and revisit, is this the best design?

But at some point you say, listen, this is a plan that enough people have looked at, let's build the dam pipeline to get the water there, let's put in the state of the art filtration system and do it, and start spending the money on implementation rather than one more design contract. That is my energy about this, my passion about this.

There is a report that was required in WRDA 2022 on a deauthorization of hydropower in the Willamette Valley System. The Portland District and Northwest Division have completed the report, but it is sitting somewhere and it kind of echoes of my

colleague across the aisle, where is that report sitting? Is it sitting in OMB? Is it sitting at Army Corps headquarters?

And it is very frustrating to see these reports completed and just nobody ever takes action to say, yes, we will actually issue it.

Mr. Telle. Senator Merkley, I will take that one. It is important when we get you information that it speak for the entirety of the Executive Branch of government.

With that said, I am committed, and that may take longer than any of us would hope, but I am committed to following the law and getting you the report that you referenced as quickly as we possibly can in coordination with our interagency partners.

Senator Merkley. Is it on headquarters' desk, or is it on the [inaudible] desk?

Mr. Telle. Senator Merkley, I don't know with the particular report that you are referencing where it is within the interagency. But it is important that the entire Executive Branch have the ability to speak and give you the right answer, based on all the information that is needed to gather across the interagency. And we have to be better at delivering that.

Senator Merkley. You will get me an answer, though?

Mr. Telle. Yes, sir.

Senator Merkley. Thank you. I am over time. So just one sentence, if the Chair will bear with me. You don't have to

respond. I will follow up.

WRDA 2020 established provisions for a 15 percent set-aside of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for emerging ports, of which we have 14 on the Oregon coast. That guidance that was required from 2020 has never been released. Let's get it released. Let's get that 15 percent doing the job that Congress said it was supposed to be doing.

Thanks.

Senator Capito. Thank you.

Before I call on Senator Ricketts, I want to announce that we are going to do our business meeting that was previously recessed, we will reconvene at 11:45 in the President's room off of the Senate Floor.

So with that, I will go to Senator Ricketts.

Senator Ricketts. Great. Thank you, Chairman Capito, and thank you, Ranking Member Whitehouse, for holding this important oversight committee meeting for the Army Corps of Engineers.

Secretary Telle, great to see you again. Congratulations on your confirmation. Glad you are here on the job.

General, glad to have you here as well. Look forward to working with you.

I am really pleased to be on this committee, because the Army Corps serves an important function in my State. When I was Governor in 2019, Nebraska and the Midwest experienced a

devastating flood that had many of our rivers, but the Missouri River in particular. Four people lost their lives, farmers lost $400 million in corn and soybeans, ranchers lost $400 million in livestock.

Federal authorities estimate the damage to Nebraska alone was $2.6 billion. I worked closely with the Corps to push for action. Together with the Governors of Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri, I partnered with the Corps to launch a planning assistance to States study, which we actually helped finance. This effort brought the Corps, governors and local stakeholders together to make better informed flood plain management decisions.

At that time, the relationship with the Corps was rocky. Too often, Nebraska's concerns were met with only explanations of why something couldn't be done, a refrain we heard here earlier, and weren't getting done quickly, or not at all. At times, I saw the Corps as more of an obstacle than a partner, and one that failed to put people first in its decision-making.

Today is a new opportunity, though, with Secretary Telle and General Graham leading the change. Yet more than six years later, many issues remain. The $3 million, three-year planning assistance study has now taken more than five years and it has cost more than $10 million. This is again a similar refrain from what we have heard from other people, projects taking

longer and costing more.

And still, it hasn't changed how the Corps has conducted business. The study has yet to be finalized, but it is not clear there is going to be any concrete, actual steps in this plan for improvement.

Another part of the challenge lies in the 2018 master manual, which governs the Corps' work on the Missouri River. The roots of the problem go back to 2004, when amendments to the 1979 manual reversed the Corps' historical flood control water management practices.

That shift fundamentally scrambled the Corp's priorities for basin management. The amendment made environmental compliance equally as important as protection of human life and property through flood mitigation. The Corps must refocus its management of the river on the agency's core values which is water management for the benefit of those who rely on it for commerce and protecting people.

Secretary Telle, do you believe the 2018 master manual puts environmental compliance on the same level as protecting human life?

Mr. Telle. Senator, I would defer to General Graham on questions about the manual and the specifics.

But I will agree with your broader point. And it is one that we have heard many times already in this hearing, which is

these projects cost too much and take too longer.

I would just, I am proud to report to you that under President Trump's leadership, the Executive Branch agencies that govern the issues that you raise are working to follow the law, the letter of the law, not beyond what Congress intended with the law. There have been a number of actions taken with NEPA, with the definition of Waters of the United States, as rendered by the Sackett decision, as well as --

Senator Ricketts. So I have a limited amount of time, so I appreciate that.

General, are you familiar with the 2018 master manual?

General Graham. Yes, Senator.

Senator Ricketts. Do you believe that it puts environmental concerns on the same level as protecting human life?

General Graham. No. We always put life, health, and safety first of the eight authorized purposes for the Missouri River.

Senator Ricketts. Okay, great. Will you commit that you will continue to do that?

General Graham. Absolutely.

Senator Ricketts. Great, because that is what we need to have happening. Because that has not been happening in the past.

Can you tell me why the planning assistance study is taking more than three years and triple the cost to get done?

General Graham. I can't specifically speak to that, but oftentimes those planning assistance to States are to provide a broad overview, and to understand what is going on in those drainage basins. Then from there, they can take that information at the State, local, or even at the Federal level and tear that off into additional studies.

We will confirm with your staff what exactly else they needed to find out.

Senator Ricketts. Great. Will you commit to getting us that report in a timely manner?

General Graham. Absolutely.

Senator Ricketts. Great. Thank you.

I want to, I have just a few seconds left, but since Senator Merkley went over, I am going to beg the Chair for a little indulgence.

Senator Capito. It is all yours.

Senator Ricketts. Thank you.

Really quickly here, critical industries along the Missouri River must be able to have predictable flows on the Missouri River. Recently, the Corps' Northwest Division announced that Gavins Point releases would be set at a minimum of 12,000 cubic feet per second from December 1st through February 2026,

December 1st of this year through February 2026.

In 2023, when the river levels dropped low, two power station facilities in Salix, Iowa, were unable to generate power during an extremely cold stretch of time when we had very frigid temperatures.

Secretary Telle, will you commit to prioritizing energy reliability when setting release levels at Gavins Point so we can avoid disruptions to power generation over the next couple of years?

Mr. Telle. Senator, absolutely. The Missouri River is one of the more complex rivers within the portfolio. We have to balance all interests and all purposes, including flood risk mitigation and navigation, and as you point out, energy product.

Senator Ricketts. Great, thanks.

General, what factors are considered in determining whether updates to the Missouri River mainstream reservoir system master water control manual are warranted?

General Graham. Senator, specifically, we will get back to your staff on what would trigger that. But broadly, it is large changes that we believe have happened in the watershed.

Senator Ricketts. Great. We will follow up with you both. Thank you very much. Appreciate your time. Thank you, Madam Chair, for giving me some time.

Senator Capito. Thank you.

Senator Padilla?

Senator Padilla. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the flexibility in our five minutes in advance.

[Laughter.]

Senator Capito. I must be in a really good mood today. I don't know.

[Laughter.]

Senator Padilla. So I want to begin by coming back to an item that General, you spoke to in your opening comments, that of the proposed new 35 percent design standard required for feasibility study approval. I understand the rationale behind the effort, but I do worry, and I think you share the concern, that larger projects will get stuck in a Catch-22, where they can't move forward without significant more resources up front while the Army Corps budget doesn't actually provide those necessary resources.

So I am worried that this could lead to a situation where the Army Corps simply stops doing any more big projects, and there is a number truly needed across the Country, projects that are critical to protecting life and property of our constituents.

We just celebrated the 20th anniversary, for lack of a better term, of Hurricane Katrina, the devastation to the people in Louisiana. I imagine a new standard like this would have

delayed the project to restore the communities out there for years and years and years. That was a $14 billion levee repair.

So, General Graham, for feasibility studies that lead to larger water resource projects costing more than $500 million, will the current annual budget for the investigations account support the level of design spending without causing multi-year delays? Or what is your ideal proposal on how to address that dynamic?

General Graham. Senator Padilla, thank you for that question. Whenever your Senator gig kind of finishes up, we are hiring. We are always looking for some MIT mechanical engineers to join the team.

Senator Padilla. There you go.

General Graham. Sir, you know well that the path to delivering quality projects on schedule within budget is to think through them carefully during this design phase. Line up the funding, and then build them rapidly with a team of expert builders. And that is just what we have not been doing.

We do need to figure out with the investigations budget and the workload we have on very complex studies how that would break out so that we can deliver those studies efficiently for these large things. The Corps had been criticized in the past, many decades ago, for, we weren't looking system-wide, we were looking at small projects scattered around.

So, wisely, we were given direction from Congress and support from the administration to start looking at larger systems. And we have done that. Coastal Texas is a great example. Same thing with projects up in New York City.

With that, we have to figure out a way to both break those down into manageable, implementable pieces that we can advance the engineering far enough that we know what it is we are proposing to build. Those also have to be budgetable. And $52 billion on a billion and a half construction budget, that is probably going to be infeasible.

So we have to square both those circumstances.

Senator Padilla. I understand. I have a little bit of a close "in" to California, by the way, not just Louisiana and New York.

But you referenced in your opening remarks some nuances that are important to recognize. Would you consider any exceptions to the 35 percent design standard requirement for large projects? There are future projects and there are projects that are sort of underway right now.

Is there any grandfathering considered before this new standard is imposed?

General Graham. Secretary Telle's guidance to us is, make sure you are applying common sense as we are going through that analysis. And Senator, that is our commitment to you, is that

we are going to apply common sense as we go through this. The goal being to deliver these projects as efficiently and effectively to protect your citizens and to make sure that our navigation, and just particularly, like the Port of Long Beach, that that amazing economic engine continues to run well.

Senator Padilla. Right, because there are ripple effects.

All right, thank you for that. Definitely will be doing some follow-up with you.

Secretary Telle, I wanted to, before I ask you about the harbor maintenance tax conversation we had previously, I just want to express my condolences on the loss of your father recently. I appreciate your willingness to be here and continue the work during a difficult time. So please convey that with your family as well.

Now, as you and I spoke during your confirmation process, the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are the busiest container port complex in the western hemisphere. I appreciated the commitment you made at the time, not just to me but to the committee, to uphold the donor and energy port funding as directed by WRDAs of 2020 and 2022.

However, since your confirmation hearing and before you were sworn in, the administration released its Fiscal Year 2025 work plan for the U.S. Army Corps as well as the budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2026. Neither document reflects the increased

funding targets for donor and energy ports that Congress directed.

So to put it mildly, that is troubling. Can you assure me and this committee that the WRDA 2020 set-aside of 12 percent of harbor maintenance trust fund obligations for donor and energy ports will be honored?

Mr. Telle. Senator Padilla, thank you for the question. We will follow the law. The Fiscal Year 2025 work plan and the Fiscal Year 2026 President's budget include $58 million in keeping with that set-aside and in keeping with the appropriations acts that have been enacted by Congress. They govern those fiscal years.

Senator Padilla. So for my constituents watching from home, is that a yes or a no?

Mr. Telle. I am just telling you that the Fiscal Year 2025 work plan and the Fiscal Year 2026 President's budget both include $58 million, which is consistent with the appropriations acts enacted by Congress.

Senator Padilla. By my simple math, that doesn't add up to the 12 percent that we had previously discussed.

Mr. Telle. Senator, your math is correct.

Senator Padilla. And that Congress had directed.

Mr. Telle. Your math is correct, Senator. That is the level set by the appropriations acts for those fiscal years.

Senator Padilla. So it is not living up to the requirement. I understand the position that you are in, but we obviously have some work to do.

Mr. Telle. Senator, we follow the laws that are proposed by this committee and the Appropriations Committee.

Senator Padilla. All right. The Chairwoman has been more than generous with me. I will do some follow-up questions for the record on the Pajaro Flood Protection Project and other important issues for my State.

Thank you both very much.

Senator Capito. Thank you.

Senator Sullivan?

Senator Sullivan. Thank you, Madam Chair, and Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here, and General, thank you for being here.

You both have a really, really critical job, I think one of the most important jobs in government. I think you are doing a great job and I am going to get to that on some of the things you have been doing in Alaska.

I do want to remind you of the context. You have seen this chart before. This was the 70 executive orders that the Biden administration issued singularly, exclusively focused on Alaska, what we called the last frontier lockup. You look, they have the actual list of them, the seven zero right there. Those are

executive orders and executive actions. No State got sanctioned more by their own Federal Government than we did in Alaska by the Biden administration.

I like to do this in public a lot because those days are over, right? We have a new EO. That was the Alaska lockup. This is the Alaska comeback and you are very familiar with this executive order. This is day one. The Trump administration issued an executive order called Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential.

We are the only State in the Country that has our own EO. It was issued on the day of the President's inauguration. And the Corps of Engineers, as you know, Secretary Telle, is highlighted in that EO in a really big way.

The part on the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, now I am reading the EO, shall immediately review, revise, rescind any agency action that may in any way hinder, slow, or otherwise delay any critical project in Alaska. And during your confirmation hearing, do you remember what you said to me about that executive order and that paragraph in particular?

Mr. Telle. Senator Sullivan, I indicated to you that I had tattooed that paragraph of that executive order on my heart.

Senator Sullivan. Yes. You tattooed that on your heart. I have to admit that was one of the best answers I have heard in

a confirmation hearing in a long time. And you are doing that. So I very much appreciate that.

Let me compliment you on the really important work that you did when we had another glacial lake outburst flood in Juneau, Alaska. Actually this was the worst, but it wasn't as bad because the Corps of Engineers had acted quickly at my request this past spring on getting those Hesco barriers to help prevent flooding.

But you also surged Brigadier General Goetz to Alaska for a whole week, and his team. They gave Juneau a lot of comfort. We have a lot of work to do.

But can I get your commitment, and General, your commitment that we are not just going to study this. The people of Juneau are having flooding every summer. And by the way, last summer and this summer, it is amazing nobody has gotten killed. But we need to get on this soon.

Can I get your commitment and any other updates you want to give me on that?

But I appreciate you surging a high-level team for a week in Alaska to be in Juneau when this happened again. We need a Corps of Engineers solution to this. And I appreciate your focus on it.

Mr. Telle. Senator Sullivan, thank you for emphasizing the importance of this challenge. Your leadership helped guide our

decision-making. I have committed to you -- let me also say I am just so proud of the United States Army Corps of Engineers, General Goetz, his team, the Alaska District, for the work that they did in real time to save lives and property in Juneau, Alaska, in mid-August.

And I have committed to you and General Graham has committed to me that we are going to be focused on a long, medium, and short term solution to address this challenge. The short-term solution is what you saw in August, and you are going to see it again as long as we need it while we are developing the medium and long-term solutions. And I will let General Graham comment on the progress on the medium and longer term solutions.

General Graham. Senator Sullivan, this is what we are built for. And being able to take a complex situation and work with our State and local partners to put a project in place rapidly. As you saw with General Goetz up there, that is what we are committed to.

So I know there is a smaller outburst happening kind of as we speak. And they are working again with the city on, I think they held off on repairing some of the existing Hesco barriers until this finishes. The technical report that we will look at laid the foundation for a long-term fix. We expect that next spring, and we will watch that closely as that work unfolds.

And that work that we are doing is going to be with all the partners who across the government at all levels has the ability to add to the solution. That is our commitment to you

Senator Sullivan. Great. I appreciate that. I know the people of Juneau really appreciate that. It is so important.

Madam Chair, do I have --

Senator Capito. Let me ask you a question. Have you voted on this --

Senator Sullivan. I am going to vote right after this one.

Senator Capito. Okay.

Senator Sullivan. Very quickly, just two more quick questions.

Relating to this EO, I met with the company that is working on a really exciting project in Alaska. It is called Graphite One outside of Nome. But they are concerned that even though they were put on the docket, it is a graphite mine, one of the largest mine deposits in the world, in Alaska, that they were put on a Fast 41 as an EA and we are hearing that the Alaska District is maybe putting them on as an EIS.

Can you gentlemen take a look at that? That seems to go against the Trump executive order and maybe even more importantly Sackett v. EPA, the recent Supreme Court case.

Mr. Telle. Senator, absolutely. This is something we take very seriously and I will just report to you that we have

guidance in place now to implement Sackett on a temporary basis while we wait for a permanent rule to implement that Supreme Court decision.

But I will also tell you that through nationwide permits which this committee has afforded the United States Army Corps of Engineers, regional permits, and good old-fashioned elbow grease, President Trump has delivered more than, or close to 800 permits for energy-related and resource-related activities, including approximately 10 percent of those in the State of Alaska in the first nine months of his administration.

Senator Sullivan. Thank you.

Final question, very quick. Port of Nome. I always put this chart up as well. Lot of action in Alaska. We have Russian and Chinese incursions into our airspace, Russian and Chinese incursions into our waters. Four incursions just in August. And the Port of Nome is going to be critical for Alaska economic activity, but also for infrastructure for national security assets.

The Corps awarded a nearly $400 million contract for phase one of the Port of Nome expansion. This is a crucial step to establishing our infrastructure in the Arctic for our economy but also for our national security.

Can I get your commitment, gentlemen, to continue on beyond phase one, which is a huge phase? We are building the Port of

Nome. We have been trying to get this done for 15 to 20 years. We are building it, thanks to your leadership; $400 million contract awarded on phase one.

But to continue that as a key issue for the Corps going forward, even beyond phase one, General, Mr. Secretary, can I get your commitment on that?

General Graham. Senator, you absolutely have our commitment. We are also looking for more sources of rock up in Alaska that can bring the construction costs down. But you absolutely have our commitment to the Port of Nome.

Senator Sullivan. Great.

Mr. Secretary?

Mr. Telle. Senator, of course.

Senator Sullivan. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator Capito. Senator Alsobrooks?

Senator Alsobrooks. Thank you so much to Madam Chair Capito and also Ranking Member Whitehouse for calling today's hearing.

I would like to also say thank you so much to our witnesses for joining us.

Mr. Secretary, in particular, I want to thank you for visiting Poplar Island in Maryland, and seeing the important ecosystem restoration work that the Army Corps is doing in Maryland.

As you saw, the Army Corps' mission in Maryland is important and far-reaching, and the Corps is responsible for dredging near the Port of Baltimore, for undertaking large-scale ecosystem projects like Mid Bay and Poplar Island and for beach nourishment to protect our coastal communities. So I am really glad that you had the opportunity.

As you know, the Corp manages over 4,300 recreation areas across the Nation, including one on the Maryland-West Virginia border. These recreation areas support local economies and provide opportunities for boating, fishing and hiking. In fact, nearly 212,000 boats are registered in Maryland, and boating remains one of the most popular recreational activities at Corps managed sites nationwide.

The administration's hiring freeze prevented the Corps from hiring seasonal staff who play an essential role in keeping these sites safe, open and well-maintained. Without them, we saw closures, reduced hours, and limited services at recreation areas.

Senator Cramer and I sent a letter urging the Corps to take immediate steps to exempt seasonal workers from the administration's hiring freeze. I was glad to hear that the Secretary of the Army subsequently granted the Corps and exemption to hire up to 320 staff for Corps recreation areas.

So either of you can answer, but I wanted to check in, and

maybe, Mr. Secretary, you can start. How many of the 320 authorized seasonal employees was the Corps able to hire?

Mr. Telle. Senator, thank you for raising this issue. And thank you for suggesting that I go see Poplar Island. It was enlightening, and I appreciate that suggestion.

You are correct that we had a shortage of recreational workers heading into the spring. Thanks to your work and Senator Cramer's work and to the administration's very quick reaction to that, we were granted an exception to policy on hiring. We have been working against that denominator that you referenced approaching 100 employees that have been hired for recreation facilities.

We expect that by next spring that we will be at a point where we will not have any impacts, or minimal impacts, as it relates to the challenge we faced this spring.

Senator Alsobrooks. Thank you.

Now, I also would like to know whether you expect the Federal hiring freezes, do you expect it to affect the work such as eco-restoration, and what procedures have you put in place to monitor and assess the impact of workforce reductions on other authorized activities of the Civil Works program?

Mr. Telle. Senator, I am not aware of any impacts on the Corps of Engineers three core missions of flood risk mitigation, navigation and aquatic ecosystem restoration.

Senator Alsbrooks. Okay. Now, the Atlantic Coast of Maryland Shoreline Protection Project is a longstanding effort to protect Ocean City and nearby areas from coastal storm damage, flooding, and erosion. It is managed by the Army Corps, and the project includes engineered beaches and dune systems spanning nearly seven miles over a 50-year period.

Now, these systems have proven effective and have prevented about $927 million in storm-related damages since the 1900s, and supporting our tourism economy. This project relies on periodic beach nourishment, with the next cycle originally scheduled for late 2025 to mid-2026. However, the replenishment has been delayed and is now not expected to begin until September of 2026.

I wonder whether you can speak to the cause of this delay.

Mr. Telle. Senator Alsobrooks, thank you for raising this issue.

You mentioned in your opening remarks that quite often, the dredged material that comes from places like the channel that services the Port of Baltimore can be used for beneficial purposes, including beach renourishment, which is really about protecting coastal communities from coastal storm risk.

You are correct: the project in Ocean City that you referenced, as you correctly referenced, has a four-year replenishment cycle. The last time it was renourished was in

2022. So that puts us on schedule for 2026.

I will defer to General Graham about any delays or causes for delay. I am not aware of any.

Senator Alsobrooks. Thank you. And General, maybe you can just say whether you foresee whether a one-year delay, what impact might that have on the overall effectiveness of the project.

General Graham. The Coastal Storm Risk Management Project, Senator, that we do many of the beach renourishment projects, we are working with Mother Nature. And she is awfully variable. So we have this periodic renourishment schedule, but sometimes the beaches erode, sometimes they accrete, as the storms move.

So there is a lot of variables that go into that.

Senator Alsbrooks. All right, thank you.

I yield. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Senator Capito. Thank you very much.

So with no further questions, I would like to thank the witnesses and all of my colleagues for their participation in today's hearing. Senators who wish to submit written questions for the record have until 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 1st, to do so. The witnesses' responses to these questions are due back to the committee no later than close of business Wednesday, October 15th, and will be submitted to the record.

I am going to run out here because we are on a vote and I

don't want to hold us up on the Floor. So don't take that as any reflection on gratitude for you all coming. So quickly, I know you have been in the position for a short period of time, but we want to stay close with the Corps and we want to stay close with the projects.

Thank you very much. With that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:26 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]