

Committee on Resources

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Statement of John Keys, III

Commissioner

Bureau of Reclamation

U.S. Department of the Interior

Before

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My name is John Keys, III; I am the Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. I am pleased to provide the Administration's views on H.R.901, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to construct a bridge adjacent to the Folsom Dam in California.

H.R. 901 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to design and construct a bridge on Federal land west and adjacent to Folsom Dam in California which would, upon completion, be transferred to the City of Folsom. H.R. 901 would authorize that \$66,000,000 be appropriated for this purpose.

Since Reclamation last testified before this Subcommittee on a similar bill last April, there have been developments in the Folsom area that I want to bring to your attention. As I am sure you are aware, Reclamation closed the two-lane road over Folsom Dam on February 28, 2003, for an indefinite period of time. This action was taken directly as part of Reclamation's responsibility for dam safety. Specifically, the final decision to take this action was due to the results of an extensive security assessment under contract with the Department of Defense's, Defense Reduction Threat Agency. It was their professional recommendation, and the Department of Interior concurred, that it was prudent to close the road over the dam to protect the facility. It is important to understand that the primary purpose of the Folsom Dam facility is flood control for the estimated 700,000 people downstream of the facility.

I certainly understand that the Folsom Dam road closure has resulted in some traffic disruption in and around Folsom. In fact, I recently met with several Folsom city officials who expressed their concern about increased

traffic control costs and the possibility of reopening the road.

While we can work with the surrounding communities in some limited ways, the responsibility of building a new bridge to handle current and future local and commuter traffic is not Reclamation's. Given that the closure decision was predicated on a homeland security issue, we are willing to discuss with the Department of Homeland Security what role they can play in future transportation planning around Folsom. However, the Administration cannot support H.R. 901 as drafted. If a new bridge is in fact warranted to address current and future traffic, I would urge the bills' sponsors and local stakeholders to work with appropriate local, state, and federal transportation agencies.

Background

When construction of Folsom Dam was completed in the mid-1950's, the narrow two lane road built on the top of the dam was intended to serve as an access road for maintenance and for incidental recreational access to the lake. In the ensuing years, as the population of Placer and El Dorado counties has grown (Placer County has been listed as the fastest growing county in the nation), and since the area adjacent to the dam is within the city limits of Folsom, California which is one of the fastest growing cities in the state the road over Folsom Dam had become a major transportation artery between these two counties. Over the last 20 years, traffic on this road has grown exponentially to the point that up to 18,000 cars were crossing the dam each day.

Reclamation has always taken the job of dam safety seriously. However, as we have all unfortunately experienced the last few years culminating in the events of September 11, 2001, the traditional dam safety reviews are no longer adequate. The following events depict activities that have shaped the evolution of Reclamation's security reviews at Folsom and at all of our facilities.

In 1995, a spillway gate at Folsom Dam failed which necessitated closing the road for an extended period for both immediate safety reasons and then to accommodate repairs to the spillway. As a result, traffic congestion adversely impacted the city of Folsom and severely restricted emergency traffic (police, fire and ambulance) from reaching one side from the other.

After the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma was bombed, the Government closely examined the vulnerability of all its structures. Reclamation completed security assessments at Folsom Dam in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 2001 and clearly documented the risks associated with open public access across this dam. The DTRA assessment was the latest of these reviews.

After the events of September 11, 2001, Reclamation closed the road across Folsom Dam which again resulted in serious traffic congestion in the community. Subsequently, the road was reopened during daylight

hours to cars and pickups, but was closed to large vehicles at all hours. This was the case until February 28, 2003.

Additional Concerns with H.R. 901

H.R. 901 would require Reclamation to build a bridge unassociated with project operations. Designing and building bridges is not the primary function of Reclamation. Passage of this bill would require Reclamation to transfer limited resources from core mission activities such as those I outlined to this Subcommittee on March 5, 2003. For example, Reclamation's request for California projects in the FY 2004 Water and Related Resources budget is approximately \$190 million.

The Administration also has concerns with the absence of local cost-sharing requirements in H.R. 901. Any Federal involvement in the design and construction of a bridge should have state and local cost sharing arrangements consistent with our policy. The City of Folsom and surrounding communities will be the primary beneficiaries of a new bridge to ease and improve the transportation issues in those communities, and a local cost share requirement would be appropriate. Further, section (1) (c) requires the Secretary to transfer the bridge to the City of Folsom at no cost. The legislation also specifically states in Section (1) (b) (2), the "Secretary shall – provide appropriate sizing and linkages to support present and future traffic flow requirements for the city of Folsom." The paragraph clearly states that the Secretary would be placed in the position of providing ancillary roadway connections and analyzing future transportation logistics. These requirements are further outside the mission of Reclamation.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, let me reiterate that the Administration understands and shares the concerns of the sponsors of H.R. 901 and the local communities about the additional traffic congestion resulting from the closure of the Folsom Dam road. The decision to close the road over the dam was not made in haste and was decided only after considerable review of the facts. However, Reclamation was entrusted with the task of protecting the Folsom Dam facility for the people who rely on it for flood control and water supply purposes. I again urge the bill's sponsors and local stakeholders to work with appropriate local, state, and Federal transportation authorities to address these traffic concerns.

That concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions.