

CONGRESSMAN

News

From _____

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

Testimony of Congressman Nick J. Rahall, II
before the Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Resources concerning the Tug Valley Flood
Protection Project.
March 30, 1982

Chairman Bevill and members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Resources
I appreciate being given the opportunity to discuss with you an issue of great concern to me and 33,000 taxpaying Americans; flood control for the Tug Valley Region which encompasses parts of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Virginia. My purpose today is to ask the Subcommittee to earmark funds for this project in FY 83.

Two years ago Congress authorized the Corps of Engineers to design and construct flood control measures necessary to protect the Tug Valley area which is prone to periodic flooding. Since 1954 the region has been flooded on the average of once every 1.3 years. One such flood in 1977 damaged 5,000 homes, totally destroying 600 of them and has cost approximately \$300 million in repairs.

Now the Administration, in flagrant disregard of the property and lives of the people of the Tug Valley, has ordered a halt to all flood control construction on Tug Fork, alleging the project is not feasible and that residents would find the floodwalls and relocations unacceptable. Based on these erroneous concepts, the Administration is not asking Congress to fund this most urgently needed flood Control project in FY 83.

Today I respectfully request the Subcommittee to include funding for Tug Fork in the FY 83 Civil Works Appropriation Bill. I obtained the following figures from the Corps of Engineers as to what level of funding they will need in FY 83 to see that construction on this project remains on schedule. The amount needed is \$16.4 million which the Corps would spend as follows:

\$4.7 million for West Williamson, WV to initiate construction of a pump station.

\$5.0 million for Pineville, KY to initiate floodwall construction.

\$2.4 million to continue detailed planning at Welch, WV, Harlan, KY, Haysi, KY, and other communities.

\$3.0 million for Barbourville, KY to initiate channel cut-off.

\$1.4 million for Pikeville, KY to initiate floodwall construction.

Most of the development that has occurred in the Tug Valley during recent years has been on the assumption that we in Congress would provide this area with some type of flood protection. Major coal companies are talking of large expansions, developers are contemplating new office buildings and water and sewer grants have been made based on the Corps flood protection plans. By authorizing flood control in 1981, we have initiated a feeling among these people that they can now bring to fruition the full economic potential of this area.

The Tug Valley should be recognized by all Americans as a vital asset in this nation's efforts to become energy self-sufficient. It possess 8% to 10% of some of the finest low sulfur coal in the nation. With resources such as this, I do not feel the Administration is exercising proper judgement by refusing to help this area solve its most persistent problem, incessant flooding.

The Administration says the project is not cost effective. When Congress authorized flood protection the Corps told us that in 1980 dollars the cost would be \$284 million. Now, after expanding the project and adding the effects of inflation, the Corps tells us the project will cost \$702 million by its completion in the mid 1990's. However, since 1957, \$630,000,000 (1981 dollars) has been spent to repair flood damages in the Tug Valley Region. If the entire project could be completed today, the cost would go down to \$411,500,000; clearly well below the price tag to repair devastation caused by floods since on 1957.

Contrary to statements made by the Administration, I can assure you that the residents of this area accept the Corps present plan with all of its floodwalls and relocations. From a quick helicopter tour of the area it is difficult for the Administration's representatives to understand the history of the area, its potential as an energy source, and the strong support the residents give to the Corps flood protection plan.

I find it difficult to explain to these taxpayers why the Administration supports defense spending at a rate of \$36 million an hour and increased foreign aid expenditures while turning its back on protecting the lives and communities of those in the Tug Valley. The Administration is making plans to stop the money but not the water.

On behalf of all who live in the Tug Valley and those Americans who will benefit from its resources, I again ask the Subcommittee to continue its support of this flood control project and earmark the \$16.4 million that is needed in FY 83.