

Opening Statement
Senator Pryor
SLPSPI/SDR Joint Hearing:
“Flood Preparedness and Mitigation: Map Modernization, Levee Inspections and Levee Repairs”
July 28, 2010

Thank you, Chairman Landrieu. I would like to welcome everyone to the hearing today. I appreciate Chairman Landrieu working with me to put together this joint subcommittee hearing on an increasingly serious issue to many in Arkansas, the State of Louisiana, and so many other states across the country, the issue of modernizing flood maps. I'd like to thank all of the other Senators for joining us today and the witnesses for taking the time to be here.

I really want to recognize the work of two of my colleagues who are not on the committee and couldn't be here today.

First, I want to identify my colleague from Arkansas, Senator Lincoln. She's been a great partner in working to address the issues we're having in AR with the flood map modernization program.

I want to highlight the efforts of my colleague from Mississippi, Senator Cochran. Senator Cochran cares deeply about this issue and has worked with me across party lines to provide relief for our communities. Unfortunately, he is in meetings preparing for Thursday's appropriations committee markup. He will submit a statement that I will submit for the record.

The purpose of this hearing is to evaluate preparedness and mitigation efforts to protect our communities from the risk of flood. We will focus on the FEMA Flood Map Modernization Program by evaluating the accuracy of the map update process, mechanisms for dispute resolution, and the impact of levee certifications on communities.

As most people in this room know, I've been talking about FEMA's flood map modernization process for several years now. At first, I was working with just a few other Senators to address implementation of the program. Now, there are Senators representing 13 different states that have expressed interest in addressing some common problems with the map modernization program implementation.

In Arkansas, we have had repeated problems with the implementation of the Flood Map Modernization Program. The problems center around two basic themes. The first is one that I think Senator Landrieu will highlight and that is in regard to levee certifications. We have some communities that gained ownership and responsibility of their levees years ago – maybe 30 or 40 years ago. And these levees may or may not have been maintained properly.

We can play the blame game all we want, but the point is: now we are in a situation where there are a good number of locally owned levees that need serious repairs and modernizations in order to be certified. This takes money. These communities lack the resources to certify and potentially repair the levees. There is very little, if any, federal money available to help

communities bring their levees up to code. And in some cases, they do not have adequate time to complete repairs and upgrades before the flood maps are finalized.

The second theme is in regard to what happens after a levee is certified – either by the Corps or by another entity. How are these levees depicted on the flood maps? There are ongoing issues in Arkansas regarding the proper way to depict the level of protection provided by a certified levee. This is a huge issue in my state because it affects both fairness and economic development.

The Mississippi River, which is the eastern border of my state, has a vast levee system that protects the communities along the river. This is a \$32 billion investment of federal, state and local funds. I have concerns that this significant investment in flood protection is not being accurately depicted on FEMA's flood maps. I also have concerns that if a needed repair is identified during the certification process, that there is not adequate time and money for the Corps to complete necessary upgrades or repairs before the maps are finalized.

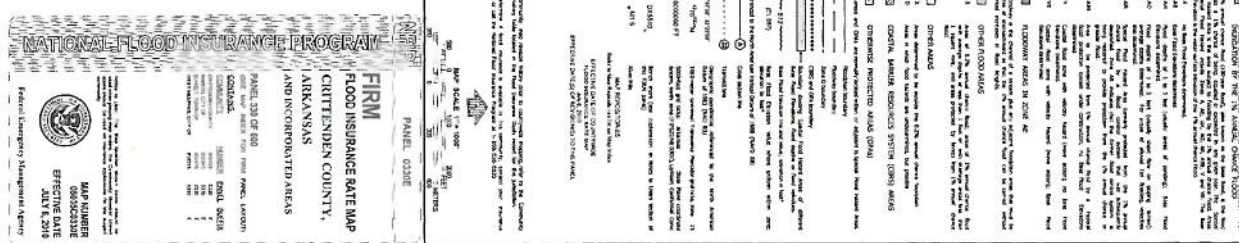
We need some real solutions to the problems we're facing. Many of us have been working on this issue for a long time with very little real, concrete progress made on addressing our concerns about transparency, flexibility and communication. I am frustrated, my constituents are frustrated and I am sure many of my colleagues are frustrated. I am frustrated because it seems like FEMA has dismissed my concerns as trivial rather than working with Congress to find a real solution to the problems facing my constituents.

Let me emphasize that I do support modernizing our maps. I think it's a good thing to do and something that we should do. I also want to recognize that FEMA and the Corps have made some changes to address some of the problems I mentioned.

I know that FEMA has established a scientific resolution panel to help resolve disputes during the map appeal process. I hope to hear more about that today. I also appreciate that FEMA is extending the preferred risk policy, which is a lower insurance rate, to people who are being required to buy flood insurance for the first time. And the Corps has made efforts to quickly complete a study to address a sand boil issue we're having on a levee in Missouri. I think all of this is progress in the right direction. And I appreciate it. But I think we still have work to do.

My goal today is to examine the impact of FEMA's flood map modernization program on communities and to identify constructive proposals to improve the program. I want to mitigate any negative consequences of the process or new map implementation on the economic development of communities. By the end of the hearing, I would like to have some concrete proposals or ideas that would improve the program.

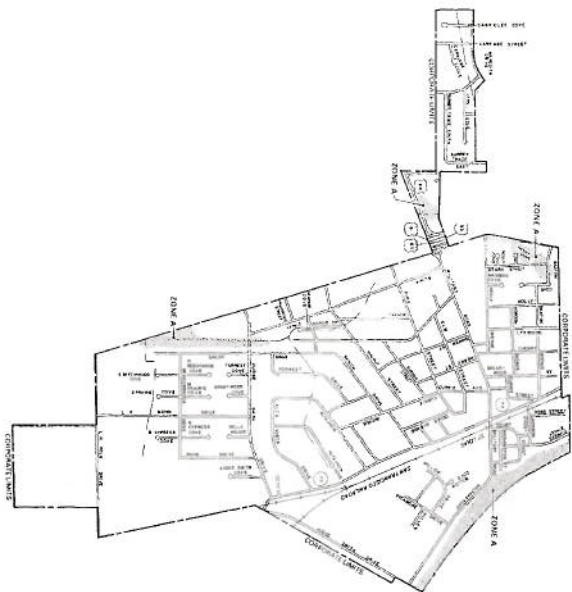
I'll save the rest of the points I'd like to raise for the question and answer session. Thank you again for being here today. I appreciate everyone's input.

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SEE TO MAP

PROPERTY MAPS ZONE A

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