

Statement to Congress on flood control

In this 1954 statement to Congress, William P. Edwards states his opposition to the construction of the Tuttle Creek dam.

Creator: Edwards, William P.

Date: May 11, 1954

Callnumber: Port 627.8 Ed98

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 219808

Item Identifier: 219808

www.kansasmemory.org/item/219808





Statement to Congress on flood control

Port.

753

K

627.8

5298

Statement of William P. Edwards, Livestock Farmer, Bigelow, Kansas, May 11, 1954

Honorable Congressman: House Document 642 contains modifications in the highly controversial Tuttle Creek Dam on the Blue River in Kansas, of which affected area I am a resident. The Tuttle Creek project is not new to Congress. Its original, vague authorization was made in 1938. There followed a 14-year running battle, until in 1952, following the flood hysteria of the preceding year, an initial appropriation was granted. However, last year further appropriations were refused, and work on the project has stopped. Before reviewing reasons why further appropriations were rejected by Congress and the Appropriation Committees of both Houses, let us first consider the original authorization of the project itself. In the hearings before the Committee on Flood Control, House of Representatives, 75th Congress, Representative Whittington of Mississippi was Committee Chairman, and Colonel Sturdevant, Chief Engineer of the Missouri River Division, represented the Corps of Engineers. These hearings were concerned with the Milford and Tuttle Creek reservoirs. There were no representatives from Kansas present from either side. Indeed, we knew nothing at that time of either the hearings or the proposed projects. The committee seemed particularly concerned with the effect the building of these reservoirs would have on the land and people of the area. On page 110 of the Hearing Report, we find Chairman Whittington asking, "What is the character of the country above the Tuttle Creek and Milford Reservoirs?" To which Colonel Sturdevant replied, "The bottom land of the valleys contains some of the best land in Kansas." Chairman Whittington then asked, "Would there be any towns or villages destroyed or required to be removed by the construction of either of these two reservoirs, Milford or Tuttle Creek?" To which the Colonel replied, "No." Yet in their testimony before the Sub-Committee on Civil Functions of the House, Second Session of the 82nd Congress, the Engineers stated that there would be nine or ten towns and villages flooded by the construction of the Tuttle Creek project alone. Perhaps the increase in storage capacity of 800,000 acre feet since the

1938 authorization accounts for this. Economic justification was computed for this dam as a multi-purpose project—recent information indicates it is now a single-purpose project of flood control. Gentlemen, it is possible that the original authorization for this project was made on somewhat inaccurate, misleading, technical information presented to the Committee back in 1938? Is it possible that this original authorization might never have been made, had the true conditions and effect of the reservoir been known or presented at that time? Most certainly the people of my area feel that Congressional assent to the plans presented in 1938 on this project, doesn't necessarily constitute Congressional assent to the present actual plans.

In the report of these same hearings, on page 108, we find this enlightening question projected by Representative Carlson, now the Honorable Junior Senator from my State, when he asked Colonel Sturdevant, "Do you believe these reservoirs will be constructed unless we secure a change in the Federal statute regarding the furnishings of right-of-way?" To which the Colonel replied, "No indication has come to my office that the people are at all interested in furnishing right-of-way for reservoirs." Gentlemen, the people were not interested in 1938, and they are not interested today. Only when the statute change was effected, permitting the Federal government to absorb all the reservoir costs of land acquisition and maintenance, as well as construction, did the reservoir program become interesting to the people. When this change was made, then suddenly, overnight, this Santa Claus program of reservoirs became popular downstream. Should the reservoir program be returned to the status and level of cost-benefit sharing that local protection works and watershed development still operate under, then the loud clamor for big dams would be suddenly silenced, and this needless controversy ended.

I should now like to touch briefly upon the immediate physical and social effects the construction of the Tuttle Creek Dam would have on the Blue Valley area and on Kansas. The "take-line" of this pro-

ject includes nearly 72,000 acres of land. At capacity, the reservoir would inundate 53,500 acres of land which is now producing sufficient food to feed over 40,000 people for a year. Tuttle Creek construction would necessitate the relocation or abandonment of all or part of two railroads, five State and National Highways, nine towns, 19 cemeteries, scores of schools and churches, hundreds of miles of county roads, R. E. A. and private electric and telephone lines. Nearly five hundred families would be forced to leave their farm homes, some of which have been in the same family for ninety years. Nearly 35% of the best, or class one, land of the three counties involved in this project, is within the reservoir basin. The well-being of this most prosperous region in the 10th Federal Reserve District is dependent upon this rich land, for these fertile, alluvial valleys furnish a dependable source of grain and livestock feed. The rolling hills bordering the valley furnish excellent pasture supporting a great livestock industry. But the key to that industry is the winter and the fattening feed raised in the valley. Less of valley production would disrupt this industry, and the economic management of a large surrounding area. This would reflect disaster to the thriving and prosperous perimeter towns. These communities would lose their trade territory and receive nothing in return. As the valleys are lost, the inevitable result would be a much more intensive farming of the highly erodible upland. This would add to our problem of soil losses and controlling water runoff. There is more to building a reservoir than can be expressed in hydrological computations. There are social and cultural losses suffered from the uprooting of a substantial citizenry with their contribution to society. These losses, though not measurable in monetary terms, are none the less real. Nor is all this destruction unique to the Blue Valley alone. These are evils incident to, and inherent in, the reservoir program for an agricultural area. They will be repeated time and again all over our State, if this program is carried out. Our State, our Nation, can ill afford the social and economic impact of such destruction. The dollar loss of production

and land in the Tuttle Creek reservoir may appear small compared to the dollar destruction suffered by the cities in the great flood of 1951. But the monetary loss of just one valley cannot be compared with the total flood loss in the Kansas River Basin, for to do so, implies that this one dam would have prevented all such downstream flood losses, which most certainly it would not have done. Tuttle Creek dam alone would not have stopped the 1951 flood. No responsible person ever makes such a claim. The Engineers' figures show that this "key" structure in operation, would have reduced the twenty foot overflow at Kansas City by less than a foot. So in order to make the reservoir program effective for flood control, the Corps of Engineers are currently considering a system of 37 major dams, with 69 smaller structures, for a total of 118 reservoirs in all, for just the Kansas River Basin alone. Such a program would obviously mean the loss of hundreds of thousands of acres of our best valley land, and dislocation of tens of thousands of people. This Gargantuan program is not official. It has never been presented to this Committee by the Engineers. Nor is it expected that it ever would be presented in its entirety. The Engineers' method of presenting their programs to Congress in a piecemeal manner, so that their scope and size cannot be reviewed, seems to be a fundamental part of the program itself. This is quite understandable in this case, for well the reservoir proponents know that such a destructive program would never be countenanced by either Kansas or Congress. And yet, each part of the program is part of the whole. The authorization of the Milford and Perry reservoirs, for example, are predicated upon the construction of Tuttle Creek. And each dam, as built, becomes the economic justification for requesting still further structures. Since neither one, nor three, or even more dams will do the flood control job by themselves, then money spent on their construction will have been wasted unless additional planned structures are completed. And thus is forged the vicious chain of dam destruction.

Gentlemen, let me here emphasize that

Statement to Congress on flood control

flood protection is definitely and desperately needed in Kansas. Let there be no misunderstanding about this. It is needed in the upstream reaches where 75% of the average annual flood loss occurs, much of it in the form of irreplaceable top soil; and it is needed in the main stream channels where peak overflows cause heavy urban damage. No one denies or debates this need. The disagreement is solely on that of method. Congress has committed flood control plans for the Kansas River basin to the Corps of Engineers, and the Engineers, without consent of the people in the affected areas, have developed a flood control program based upon the construction of large reservoirs near the mouth of tributary streams, together with local protection works for the towns and cities, along the main river. This program is known as the Pick-Sloan plan for Kansas. The measures being considered for authorization at this time are part of that plan. There is no opposition present to local protection works. In fact, we are all agreed that they should be authorized and their construction pressed as rapidly as possible. Only that part of the program calling for large dams meets with opposition. The highly controversial Tuttle Creek project typifies the opposition to flood control reservoirs in the alluvial area of the plains states. Tuttle Creek Dam has grown from a local selfishness to a symbol of democracy in action; from the Engineers' "pet baby" to a project to a major problem, from a sign of their "juvenile delinquent." Thinking Kansans have appraised reservoir destruction; they have considered their cost in dollars and social impact; they have evaluated, with expert, hydraulic engineering help, their limited effectiveness in controlling floods. As a result, they have demanded through legislative resolution, and their direct vote in a Congressional election, that Tuttle Creek Dam be stopped, and implied that no similar structures be started. This action seemed to meet with the approval of most people, even those in the flood plains of the Kansas River. Only a small minority, mostly in Kansas City, Missouri, persisted in demands for large dams as they visualized the chance of getting free water for industrial use, at tax-

payers' expense. The dawn of harmony between upstream and down river factions seemed near, as a cooperative effort to coordinate a program for upstream watershed work with downstream local protection works was developed. Such a program, declared sound by hydraulic engineering experts, was recognized as extending, at less cost, greater benefits to more people, without destruction or opposition. But when this approach was suggested to the Corps of Engineers for their approval, and it was suggested they separate the consideration of large dams from consideration of local protective works, the Corps of Engineers balked. They took the position that their present Pick-Sloan plan was unalterable, except as it grew in size and scope, and bluntly told the desperate people of the cities, that they could either accept this plan as proposed or they would get nothing at all. Whaton unfair choice! To obtain local protection works, they would have to accept the reservoirs. Does that help to explain why there are so many downstream requests before this Committee for authorization of House Document 642, even though it does include the objectionable features of large dams?

It is an added pleasure to appear before a policy-making committee such as this. In opposing appropriations for authorized projects, one feels he has two strikes against him before he gets to bat. But here we start from scratch. May I then urgently request that, before further authorizations for large dams are made, the reception accorded the Tuttle Creek project be considered, and the status of that controversial dam be reviewed? Why were funds for Tuttle Creek so long denied? And more specifically, why, after the initial appropriation was made and construction started, were further appropriations refused last year?

Gentlemen, Tuttle Creek appropriations were not denied last year as an economy measure, nor to balance the budget, or reduce taxes. Nor were appropriations for flood control structures in general dropped. Why then, Tuttle Creek? Because of the preponderance of engineering and popular objection to this wasteful and destructive

type of flood control approach. Because appropriations for it was dropped from the budget. Because the Missouri Basin Survey Commission, appointed by President Truman, after comprehensive study on basin flood problems, reported adversely last year, to building Tuttle Creek Dam or similar structures. Because the surveys of the board of independent, expert, hydraulic engineers, employed by the Kansas Industrial Development Commission to study flood control of the Kansas River Basin, emphatically condemned Tuttle Creek and the entire reservoir system as a means of flood control. Because Engineers from both the State College and the University of Kansas, looked askance at the reservoir program. Because last year, the State Legislature, the elected representatives of the people, after consideration and hearings, overwhelmingly passed resolutions in both Houses, requesting stoppage of work on Tuttle Creek. Because the electorate of an entire Congressional District expressed their objection to the large dams when, in the last general election, they chose to represent them in Congress, an anti-dam Democrat, Honorable Howard S. Miller, to replace the then incumbent, pro-dam Republican. And need I remind the Committee, this action was culminated in a Republican year, and in an area which had never before sent a Democrat to Congress. Flood control by such means as Tuttle Creek was the only real issue at stake in this election. I feel the Committee should further reflect that all three reservoirs now before their consideration—Milford, Perry and Tuttle Creek—are all located, in all or part, in this Congressional District. It should be of further bearing on the Committee's thinking, to realize that all of the above mentioned action and findings have taken place since the great flood of 1951.

The objection in Kansas to the large reservoir method of flood control, is neither new nor limited in area. It does not just come from the affected valleys. It is not the ranting of a vocal minority. Rather, it encompasses an entire Congressional District, most of the State, and many areas over the Nation.

Congressmen, we realize that well-fi-

nanced associations, with full-time employees, are able to flood hearings with letters, telegrams, and personnel, to give the impression they represent the thinking of folks back home. Actually, the home sentiment has already been expressed many times, through elections, the State Legislature, and the stand against the dam by State organizations such as the Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, National Manufacturers Association, C. I. O., Watershed Associations, and on and on. The record speaks for itself, and no amount of pressurizing tactics before Committees in Washington can erase it.

Who should make the flood control policy for Kansas—the people concerned, the National Congress, or an agency of the government, which in turn is then given the power to carry out the policy they developed? When we try to unify flood control thinking in Kansas, we are told by the pro-damers that the policy has already been decided—Pick-Sloan or nothing. When we protest to the Corps of Engineers, they reply, "Sorry, policy is not our department. We only carry out the mandates of Congress." When we contact Congressmen, they say policy has not yet been formulated, and only a few projects have been authorized. It is all rather confusing to the lay mind. Dare we to suggest that it is time to stop the present piecemeal, approach to the problem, the present vague and illusory ramblings, the present autocratic methods used with no regard for public objections, the present bureaucratic bungling with no attempt at local control or participation.

It is time to get something definite into the records in the way of total plans and total costs and total methods for Kansas flood control. We commend authorization of local protection work for the cities requesting them along the Kaw River. But we urge this Committee to deny further authorization for large flood control dams, and to instruct the Engineers, or some other agency, to bring in for review and evaluation of Congress and the people of Kansas, a more acceptable, workable, and practical approach to our flood control problems.