

Opening comments Stephen Estopinal, Acting President,
Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East
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(available on MP3)

When I first came to this Authority, I quickly discovered that this was the Authority without any authority.

We were not the local sponsor of the new construction that's been going with the Corps of Engineers. We were not afforded the opportunity to review, approve or disapprove plans for the protection system. We were not the, we were not the partner. And when we did comment, our observations were usually ignored.

We objected to the T-wall design for 23 miles across the great wall of St. Bernard. We noted that voids would develop underneath the slab the way it was designed. We were promised a solution, but nothing changed.

We strenuously objected to using uncoated steel for the sheet and batter piles for that same 23 miles. And strenuously is an understatement. Using raw steel in a marine environment is contrary to engineering practices. We were ignored.

We pleaded for Option 2 on the outfall canals for the city of New Orleans. We even established to create a smaller footprint for the structures. Option 1 was built.

We objected to the barge gate to remain open, and during, particularly during Hurricane Season. The original plan was that that barge gate was going to be closed all the time, except the time, when the sector gate needed to be repaired. Recently, we re-issued a letter to the Corps requesting a policy change... because as you know barge gates - all gates are operated according to a manual that's written by the Corps provided to the operator, whoever that operating authority is. We have yet to hear a reply.

We objected to the storm surge models, a computational process used by the corps, to the point where our commission had our own study done. And our own study said that the overtopping rate would be considerably higher. This is of particular importance for the surge barrier where overtopping could easily fill the inner harbor, with the inner harbor gates overflowing. And I think—finally—because of our protest and because of the CPRA who was also protesting as well, but I wasn't a witness to it.

Peer review of the system was promised, and somehow—surprise—the Corps of Engineers said that peer review of the design and construction was finished. I was the only one that found that out. But that review has been done, in fact, we'll have a report on it later today. And I think it confirms our fears.

So, also, when I first came to the Corps, I was amazed at the lack of property recordkeeping, the right-of-way documentation. The system that we used was inherited by the old levee board, and it was very primitive. Even in some sections, they didn't have any record of their right-of-way. And that was through the result of the old board practices. So we're taking steps, in what we have control of. We're taking steps to bring our record keeping to the 20th century, we're going to work later on getting to the 21st

century. But lets, we have a long way to go. But where the record system of keeping right-of-way documentation was primitive, the acquisition actions by the Corps was absolutely barbaric. We will be taking steps to improve that, the documentation of existing right-of-way and the process of acquiring rights-of-way as necessary.

This Authority has been handed a new system. It's big, it's expensive, it's powerful, it's strong. And it's flawed in many ways. We're dedicated to find those weak spots and fix them if we can. Identifying other areas that were not even considered in the protection system, so that we can bring our storm surge protection up to the level that is engineeringly acceptable. Which is something a lot better than 100 year protection. And that's the end of my comments.