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**Committee:** Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy & Water Development  
**Event:** [A Review of the President’s Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation](#)  
**Date:** May 21, 2026

**Executive Summary:** On May 20, 2026, the Senate Appropriations Energy and Water Development Subcommittee held a hearing to examine the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 budget requests for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). The hearing focused on the administration's proposed budget reductions for the agencies amidst severe Western droughts and an impending expiration of infrastructure funding. Senators and witnesses also discussed specific project concerns and issues regarding project timelines and red tape.

**Member Toplines:**

*Chair John Kennedy (R-LA)*<sup>1</sup>: Kennedy expressed support for the Corps while acknowledging that the administration’s budget reflects the president’s priorities, even if Congress ultimately rewrites it. He focused heavily on the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, arguing that revenues collected from port users should be used to support ports and dredging infrastructure rather than redirected to other spending priorities.

*Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA)*: Murray emphasized the importance of federal investment in water and flood-control infrastructure. She sharply criticized the administration’s proposed budget cuts to the Corps and BOR, arguing the reductions would worsen project backlogs, delay repairs, and undermine preparedness for droughts, floods, and other infrastructure risks. Murray warned that staffing reductions are harming agency’s abilities to deliver projects on time and accused the administration of targeting Democratic-led states.

**Witness Toplines:**

*William Graham, Chief of Engineers and Commanding General, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*: Graham highlighted the Corps’ flood-control and levee repair efforts in Washington State, specifically praising work at the Howard Hanson Dam and along the Green River levee system following severe flooding. He emphasized the Corps’ coordination with state and local officials and noted that funding provided by Congress was being used to accelerate levee repairs before future storms. Graham also focused heavily on infrastructure project delivery and cost management, acknowledging concerns about cost overruns. He stressed that stable and predictable funding is critical for efficient infrastructure delivery and noted the agency is expanding its workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> The opening remarks of Chairman Kennedy were unavailable at the time of this memo’s distribution.

[Adam Telle, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, U.S. Army:](#) Telle emphasized the economic importance of waterborne commerce and highlighted major infrastructure investments. He repeatedly stressed flood-control and water infrastructure priorities. Telle outlined a proposed budgeting reform to separate district salaries and expenses from project costs, arguing the change would improve transparency and better incentivize timely infrastructure delivery.

[Andrea Travnicek, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Department of the Interior:](#) Travnicek framed BOR's budget request around strengthening domestic water and power infrastructure, emphasizing the agency's role in delivering water for agricultural, municipal, and industrial use, supporting flood control and recreation, and generating hydropower across the West. She highlighted major investments in water storage, conveyance, and infrastructure modernization. Travnicek emphasized ongoing efforts to address drought conditions and protect the Colorado River system, while stressing the importance of deferred maintenance and dam safety.

### **Major Takeaways:**

#### Project-Specific

- Murray secured commitments from Telle that the Corps would carry out previously appropriated funding for the Howard Hanson Dam and ensure the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund delivers its share to donor ports, including Seattle and Tacoma.
  - She also emphasized concerns the Corps had cancelled projects in Democratic-led states and referred to FY 2026 language that required written justification before terminating, pausing or altering approved projects. Telle replied that no projects had been terminated as Murray described. Instead, he noted district commanders may have made recommendations to terminate studies but those had not reached senior-level decision-makers.
- Sen. **Cindy Hyde-Smith** (R-MS) praised funding for the Yazoo Backwater pumps and Arkabutla Dam repairs.
  - She noted structural concerns at the Arkabutla Dam, which Telle described as one of the Corps' top priorities and shared that construction could start in 2028 and be completed within five years.
- During an exchange with Sen. **Gary Peters** (D-MI), Travnicek confirmed the use of field studies this summer to address seepage issues at the El Vado Dam in northern New Mexico.
- Sen. **John Hoeven** (R-ND) praised the work on the Eastern North Dakota Alternative Water Supply.
- Sen. **Lisa Murkowski** (R-AK) urged the witnesses to consider public-private partnerships with local miners to address glacial flooding.
  - Murkowski also pressed Telle on the strategic necessity of the Port of Nome and raised alarms that staffing reduction at the Corps Alaska district threaten project timelines. Telle committed to prioritizing Nome and monitoring staffing levels closely.

### Permitting

- Sen. **Katie Britt** (R-AL) asked how the Corps could streamline overlapping permitting requirements and environmental reviews with the Environmental Protection Agency.
  - Telle cited the administration's "Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork" [initiative](#), updated Waters of the United States guidance, and pending rulemaking intended to provide regulatory certainty.

### Studies

- Sen. **Jeff Merkley** expressed frustration that the Willamette Hydropower study, while completed, appears stalled at the Office of Management and Budget.
  - Telles argued the issue involves interagency deliberation over taking hydropower facilities offline and transferring them to a power marketing agency, and said he was working to get the study to Congress as quickly as possible.
- Britt secured a commitment from Telles to cooperate on a study involving the Tennessee-Tombidbee Waterway authorized in the *Water Resources Development Act of 2020*.

### Funding

- Murray highlighted funding in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)* and *Inflation Reduction Act* to support canals, dams, storage, recycling, and desalination efforts.
  - She warned of a funding cliff related to IIJA funding expiring in October and argued the FY 2027 budget does not address this issue. Travnicek responded that BOR is working to approve funds from prior years, including aging-infrastructure funding.
- Sen. **Martin Heinrich** (D-NM) asked whether BOR would use WaterSMART funds to reduce stress in water-scarce basins. Travnicek responded that she would look into specific grants to address this issue and noted BOR would continue to leverage WaterSMART.
  - Heinrich noted Congress has directed the Corps and BOR to work with the National Academy of Sciences on durable integrated Rio Grande water resource solutions. Graham argued Corps does not have authority or funding to transfer funds to the National Academy of Sciences, but committed to working with Heinrich's staff on a path forward.