

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 21, 2021

The Honorable Lieutenant General Scott A. Spellmon
Chief of Engineers and Commanding General
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Dear Lieutenant General Spellmon,

We write in support of the 3x3x3 exemption request submitted by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Galveston District. This exemption will allow USACE to further review water conveyance solutions that are embraced by the public, prioritize life safety, and best utilize non-federal sponsorship dollars.

When Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, it devastated communities throughout the City of Houston and across the Gulf Coast region. Harvey killed at least 68 people, more than half of them in Harris County, and it caused \$125 billion in damages, making it the second costliest hurricane to make U.S. landfall in more than 100 years. Across our area, residents watched waters rise on their streets, then in their homes. And many still worry it will happen again every time we see rains like those we have seen this year.

Over the past four years since Hurricane Harvey, the issue of flood management has been of paramount importance in our districts. As part of these efforts, Congress authorized the USACE to conduct the Buffalo Bayou and Tributaries Resiliency Study, a study into the viability of different flood control projects along Buffalo Bayou and surrounding the Addicks and Barker reservoirs designed to protect Houston and Harris County, which received record rainfall during Harvey. One of the most publicly favored concepts explored in the report was to construct underground flood tunnels leading away from the reservoirs to increase water conveyance. When USACE released its Interim Report last year, however, it excluded further study of the underground tunnel concept because of the high costs.

As we continue to experience the effects of rising sea-levels and temperatures, we need to approach this project with a vision for the future. It is important to explore possible options, especially those with public support, rather than eliminate potentially successful and preferred ideas at this point solely on the basis of cost or logistics. Indeed, we saw in Hurricane Ida the importance of infrastructure investment in mitigating flood risk when the levees and flood walls built following Hurricane Katrina prevented potentially catastrophic flooding from this devastating Category 4 storm with a nearly 12-foot storm surge from the Gulf of Mexico toward the city. The importance of making the right investment, and the return on that investment in the case of Hurricane Ida, cannot be understated.

As Houstonians, we understand the importance and value of a comprehensive approach to flood management, and we want to make the right investments necessary to protect our community from future storms. Harris County voters have already approved \$2.5 billion in bonds to invest in regional flood management. And our community supports continuing to study underground tunnel concepts as a means of flood protection in the County. These tunnels are supported as a potential solution by the public and also by local sponsors and USACE. In expressing its support, Harris County has committed the funds for the extension of the Buffalo Bayou and Tributaries Resiliency Study.

USACE's work on this matter is vital to our flood protection planning efforts, which we hope will better prepare us for future weather-related events in our area. Additional time is needed to further study this project and, as the deadline for this study has passed, USACE needs to obtain an exemption approval to move forward. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress



Troy Nehls
Member of Congress

cc: Maj. Gen. William H. Graham Jr., Deputy Commanding General