

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-2402

April 2, 2019

Nita Lowey, Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
H-307 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Kay Granger, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

I am writing to you to draw your attention to the critical flooding and infrastructure issues that are impacting my district in Mississippi as well as throughout the state. As you begin to deliberate the Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations, I am requesting that the following project receive priority consideration for funding. The ongoing presumption has been that back-water pumps would be the solution to this problem of flooding, that has dated back to the 1940s.

This project is of critical importance for the second congressional district of Mississippi. These issues of flooding have persisted over the years and has worsened as evidenced by the aftermath of a severe tornado storm that left approximately 500,000 acres of the Mississippi Delta under water just last month. The use of water pumps would essentially prevent flooding in the area by lifting excess rainfall runoff from the Yazoo backwater area and into the Mississippi river.

Legislative Background Information

*In 1941, Congress authorized the project improvements that included a plan for pumps to be constructed in the Flood Control Act of 1941. After the plan was reviewed by the Army Corp of Engineers, they recommended a plan that did not include a pumping plant but included levees and gravity drainage only. Congress appropriated funds to the Yazoo Pumps project from 2002-2009.*

*In 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) wielded its seldom-used authority to initiate the veto process of the project by use of the Clean Water Act after determining that the Yazoo Pumps would*

cause “unacceptable damage” to “some of the richest wetland and aquatic resources in the nation.”<sup>1</sup> Environmentalists fought the pumps for decades, saying they would dry out and destroy wetlands dotting the region. They also argued the pumps, estimated to cost \$220 million, were too expensive and would mainly benefit farmers.<sup>2</sup> In 2011, Congress rescinded \$22 million worth of unobligated funds previously appropriated to the Yazoo Pumps project. Later in 2012, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit upheld EPA’s authority to veto the pumps project.

The Mississippi Levee Board is the local sponsor for the Yazoo Backwater Project. After meeting with the Levee Board at a local informational flood meeting last month, I was able to speak with local leaders and constituents and hear their concerns regarding flooding. An overwhelming majority of the attendees voiced the importance of the usage of water pumps to combat the significant flooding issues in the Yazoo backwater area. As indicated above, there continues to be significant flooding along the lower Mississippi River and the backwater area spanning over the last 10 years. Between 2008-2018, approximately \$377 million in damages has occurred because of the continued flooding.

This issue is not only impacting the homes and livelihood of constituents when we experience high flood levels but farmers in Mississippi are heavily impacted as well. The big economic blow will fall on farmers in the area. By the time things dry out, it will be too late to plant corn. It may still be possible to plant cotton, but farmers might be limited to a late planting of soybeans.<sup>3</sup> With agriculture being an immense economic source, specifically in my district, it is vital for us to remedy this problem.

Again, I am respectfully requesting that in preparation for the FY20 Appropriations bill that you would consider funding the Yazoo Backwater Project. Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of this request, and I wish you great success as you deliberate this very important legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Claytrice Henderson in my office at (202) 225-5876.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfe, Anna, *Controversial, decades-old Yazoo pump project included in Cochran-led appropriation bill*, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/politics/2017/12/25/controversial-decades-old-yazoo-pump-project-included-cochran-led-appropriation-bill/930719001/> (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Amy, Jeff, *In Mississippi backwater, flood rises after weeks of waiting*, <https://phys.org/news/2019-03-mississippi-backwater-weeks.html> (2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*