

## ***Oroville Dam Catastrophe: Once Again, A Wake-Up Call For the Nation***

By Patrick Ruckert

May 30, 2017

Diane Sare at the May 27 Manhattan Project meeting (<https://larouchepac.com/20170529/manhattan-town-hall-event-diane-sare-and-hal-cooper>) said, “ I wanted to ask, because I think part of people not actually thinking about what needs to be in terms of the solutions, is because of the insanity of budgets and accounting, but also, since they're terrified to think of the solution, they're also terrified to think of the potential worst case scenario which might impel us to move more quickly. And one of the things Mr. LaRouche was interested in is getting a projection, that is: What happens if we do nothing? What happens if we don't do these repairs? We don't repair the tunnels?”

She described during her presentation at that meeting, if not a terrifying picture of the present state of New York City, as least a catastrophic one. Major sections of the subway system and the tunnels into the city, all over 100 years old, will be partially shut down this summer for months so major repair work can be done. As many as 250,000 people who commute into New York City will have to find alternative means of doing so.



*Commuters crowd onto a New York City subway platform (Dan Phiffer | flickr)*

My article in the March 3, 2017 issue of EIR, “Oroville Dam’s near catastrophe: A wake up call for the nation,” [http://www.larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2017/eirv44n09-20170303/35-38\\_4409.pdf](http://www.larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2017/eirv44n09-20170303/35-38_4409.pdf) began with this:

"February 26, 2017—Late Sunday afternoon on February 12, an emergency alarm was sounded by the Yuba County, California Sheriff:

*'This is an evacuation order. Immediate evacuation from the low levels of Oroville and areas downstream is ordered. A hazardous situation is developing with the Oroville Dam auxiliary spillway. Operation of the auxiliary spillway has lead to severe erosion that could lead to a failure of the structure. Failure of the auxiliary spillway structure will result in an uncontrolled release of flood waters from Lake Oroville. Immediate evacuation from the low levels of*

*Oroville and areas downstream is ordered. This in NOT A Drill. This in NOT A Drill. This in NOT A Drill.'*

"Soon, 188,000 people were in their cars, jamming the roads and becoming more and more panic stricken as authorities over emergency broadcast networks were warning that the Oroville Dam emergency spillway could collapse within the hour. Had it done so, a 30-foot wall of water would have swept down the valley of the Feather River. The casualties would have been in the thousands."

For those 188,000 people that day was terrifying.



***Oroville Dam and spillways***

*Aerial photo taken Sunday morning, February 12, shows water running over the emergency spillway, at the left, and down the hill into the diversion pool. The broken main spillway flows at center and the dam is at the far right.*

While the Oroville Dam spillway collapse has been that wake-up call for the nation, what has happened since at the dam provides us with another wake-up call, this one demonstrating how the rebuilding of the nation must be done.

My weekly "California Drought (and Flood) Update" has had an Oroville Dam update section beginning early March, and one can find there extensive reportage and photos, for those interested in knowing more. <http://www.californiadroughtupdate.org/>

Hal Cooper said at that Manhattan Project meeting May 27, "I understand that the Trump administration has proposed making the waiting periods for decisions on major construction projects to be reduced from 10 years to 3 years, and a lot of that has to do with rules and regulations and policies."

What has been done in the four months since the dam's spillway busted goes far beyond the streamlining of regulations cited by Hal. The entire regulatory structure of the state and federal governments have been thrown in the garbage can, including the normally required environmental impact statement. The announcement, bidding and awarding of contracts process, which normally takes years, has been done in less than two weeks. The actual construction work to repair the spillway began in early May, after more than two million tons of rock and dirt washed into the Feather River had been removed. That job was done on a 24 per-day, seven days a week schedule.





*Excavators remove debris from the Diversion Pool below the main Oroville Dam spillway in this photo from March 29. Bill Husa — Mercury-Register*

The construction contract to rebuild both the broken spillway and the emergency spillway was awarded to the Kiewit Corp., an internationally renowned contractor for big jobs. Work is now proceeding on a six-day per week and 20 hours per day schedule.

Earlier, on April 12, as reported by the Chico Enterprise-Record, Bill Croyle, state Department of Water Resources Acting Director said that normally, a project of this size would take years just for the planning. “We need hours and days for approval vs. weeks, months and years,” he said. Rather than have paperwork shuffle back and forth, staff from agencies will meet together, Croyle said.

Having already spent over one-quarter of a billion dollars in removing the debris, the repair job contract adds another \$275 million, putting the total over \$500 million. That does not include the costs to repair other damages resulting from the emergency not directly related to the dam. Over the two to three years expected to complete the project, the total cost will probably verge on \$1 billion.



*Heavy equipment works Wednesday to break up remaining concrete on the lower part of the damaged main Oroville Dam spillway so a replacement can be constructed. (Bill Husa — Mercury-Register)*

The California State Natural Resources Secretary said on March 1, that the state requires \$50 billion to repair roads, dams and other infrastructure threatened by floods, such as the extensive levee system on the state's rivers.

The American Society of Civil Engineers says it will cost \$65 billion a year over the next 10 years to fix California's overall infrastructure — roads, bridges, dams, etc. And that's from a report that is now more than four years old.

The engineers said this in their 2012 "Report Card" on California's overall infrastructure needs:

"In 2012, the 10-year total unfunded infrastructure investment required has increased to \$650 billion. In 2006, California voters passed almost \$42 billion worth of infrastructure measures on the ballots, and although that was a good start and it has certainly helped at least maintain or in some cases improve the grades, the 2006 ballot measures represent only a drop in the bucket compared to the \$650 billion needed to move California in the right direction."

And for those in California, especially Governor Jerry Brown, they might think twice about leading "the resistance" to President Trump. On April 2, the Trump administration announced that the President had approved federal aid to California of \$274 million for Oroville Dam repair and other damage done in the state by winter storms. That money will come from FEMA.

Now all that, if it were done, would do nothing to deal with the state's chronic water supply crisis as was seen in its most extreme form in the just ended six-year drought. Both new water storage facilities and desalination plants are required, both of which, if put on the same work schedule now being seen at Oroville Dam, could be completed in three or four years.



***The Carlsbad CA desalination plant***

*After over 15 years of the permitting process and 14 legal challenges, the plant took three years to build and began delivering 50 million gallons of freshwater daily in December, 2015*

As we have seen in the Oroville Dam case, when something must be done, neither money, nor the EPA, nor the permitting and bidding process will be allowed to hold back getting the job done.

That is the spirit required to rebuild the nation. That is the new wake-up call for the nation from the Oroville Dam catastrophe.