

New York City Can Learn a Lesson from the Oroville Dam Catastrophe

By Patrick Ruckert

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On June 29, just days after a subway derailment in New York City, which injured 34 people and did substantial damage to the tunnel, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency for the Metropolitan Transit System. In California, the Oroville Dam spillway collapse in February and threatened a catastrophic flood forcing 180,000 people to flee for their lives. There are hundreds of potential infrastructure disasters as dramatic, or even more so, across the length and breadth of the nation.

As this publication has reported, and demanded, again and again, the President must hear a loud and clear call from the American people that nothing less than enacting a full Hamiltonian credit system to fund \$2-3 trillion per year in repairing and building the nation's infrastructure and a new platform of productive economic development. It certainly is not enough to repair the nation's broken-down infrastructure; not when entire systems like the New York City transit system is beyond repair.

While California's water management system 40 years ago was the envy of the world, it can no longer provide the water required by a population that today is twice as large as it was then, and, as the Oroville Dam spillway collapse demonstrates, at least parts of it is falling apart. That incredible system was the first in the world to unite multiple watersheds and river systems into one coherent water delivery machine. Now a new platform for the entire continent is required; one that creates a unified continental water management system, as the proposed North American Water and Power Alliance (NAWAPA) would do. You want a real job? There will be several million lasting 25 years building NAWAPA. (NAWAPA XXI Animated Overview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbSZ_uSTcEY)

It is not enough to show people a list of projects that are of urgent necessity. That list is decades old and gets longer every year. The America people must be awakened once again to a great spirit of adventure and mission, like that which grabbed them and propelled the Apollo Project to the Moon.

Decades of destruction of America's physical economy as the parasites of Wall Street turned the nation into a gambling casino, and the concomitant virtual obliteration of any sense in our people that they are important because they contribute to building, growing, manufacturing all that we all require to live and what the future requires, has produced in the minds of too many "that nothing can be done, it will never work, they won't let us do it."

That mind-set must end now. The useless and futureless "jobs" most younger people have today was not a condition created by God. So, grab your future in your own hands, join with LaRouche political movement to awaken our fellow citizens to their responsibilities: Blast the Hell out of every elected official and others until they join the campaign to really make America great again by enacting that Hamiltonian credit system that will open the doors to undertaking one great project after another.

What is accepted as today's reality can be changed in a minute. So, let's look at one of those "minutes" that changes everything, and there we will find that once sacrosanct procedures, laws, regulations and even financing can and will die when it is necessary that they do so.

Oroville, New York City, the Nation

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 began with this:

"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. For those millions in New York City not only is being stuck in a broken-down subway car terrifying, but even the ability to get to work in the morning has become a crap-shoot.



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.

The near catastrophe began when on February 9 the spillway of Oroville Dam began disintegrating, sending huge chunks of concrete and millions of tons of earth and rocks into the Feather River below the dam. The Oroville Dam is the tallest dam in the nation at 770 feet and is a lynchpin of the entire California water management system that provides water to nearly 30 million people and irrigates millions of acres of the nation's most productive farm land.

Immediately, the water-flow down the spillway was stopped and the reservoir behind the dam began to rise and then over-flowed into the emergency spillway, which had never been used in the fifty year life of the dam. Three days later, as it became clear that the foundation of the emergency spillway was

being undermined by the water-flow, threatening to collapse it, the emergency evacuation order was issued. Only by opening the gates of the damaged spillway once again was the immediate danger alleviated.

Tear Up All the Rules

While the Oroville Dam spillway collapse has been a wake-up call that the ignoring of the nation's deteriorating infrastructure for decades guarantees that disaster will strike, it is what has happened since at the dam that provides us with another wake-up call, this one demonstrating how the rebuilding of the nation must be done.

What has occurred in the six months since the dam's spillway busted goes far beyond the streamlining of regulations called for by President Trump. The entire regulatory structure of the state and federal governments has been thrown in the garbage can, including the normally required and usually obnoxious environmental impact statements. There has been no years long study of the problem, no drawn out court battles delaying construction, and no bureaucratic or other delaying action allowed by the legislature, the Congress or anyone else.

That spillway must be repaired and repaired fast before the rainy season begins in October. And so the announcement, bidding and awarding of the construction contract process, which normally takes years, was 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 hours 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. As many as 500 workers, dozens of pieces of heavy equipment, a large fleet of trucks, and two concrete plants built on site are now working 20 hours per day six days, per week to get the first phase completed by October 1.

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.

From where would that money come? Virtually out of thin air. It certainly had not been budgeted. The Governor, Jerry Brown, requested from FEMA emergency funds for repairing the spillway and other infrastructure damaged by the winter storms. 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 needs.



Heavy equipment works 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)

Who in the Congress is saying that what is being done at Oroville Dam should be done for the New York City subway and train system and another hundred similar potential disasters all around the nation? Not a one of them. Do we hear that from the Trump administration? Not yet. How about from the American people? If not terrorized by 20 years of hell and destruction that our own government has hit them with, perhaps they are numbed by the drugs and entertainment they ingest.

So what? We have the example of Oroville Dam, so let us use it to shake them all to life once again.

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 emergency.