

**RIVER AND HARBOR APPROPRIATION BILL:
HEARINGS ON H. R. 13462 HELD BEFORE
THE COMMITTEE ON RIVERS AND
HARBORS; HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SIXTY-FIFTH CONGRESS, THIRD SESSION;
DECEMBER 3,4,7, AND 11, 1913**

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ON

H. R. 13462

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P. 25

HELD BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON RIVERS AND HARBORS

U. S. CONGRESS. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SIXTY-FIFTH CONGRESS

THIRD SESSION

CONSISTING OF

JOHN H. SMALL, North Carolina, *Chairman.*

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THOMAS GALLAGHER, Illinois.
THOMAS J. SCULLY, New Jersey.
SAMUEL M. TAYLOR, Arkansas.
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DECEMBER 3, 4, 7, and 11, 1918



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RIVER AND HARBOR APPROPRIATION BILL.

COMMITTEE ON RIVERS AND HARBORS,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Tuesday, December 3, 1918.

The committee this day met, Hon. John H. Small (chairman) presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will now begin consideration of the river and harbor bill, and will take up each item for which an estimate is made, and members of the committee will feel at liberty to inquire as to any item for which no estimate is made and the reason therefor.

We have Gen. Taylor, representing the Chief of Engineers, present this morning, and he will be with us during the consideration of the bill.

The members of the committee will remember that the country is divided into river and harbor districts, and the projects are so divided in the memorandum book now, instead of by States, as formerly.

STATEMENT OF BRIG. GEN. HARRY TAYLOR, CORPS OF ENGINEERS.

Gen. TAYLOR. Mr. Chairman, perhaps it would be well for me to make a preliminary general statement on the subject of the estimates. It will be noted that the total of the estimate is very small, amounting to \$15,870,500. The total for maintenance is \$2,973,000, the total for further improvement \$7,647,500, for examinations, surveys, and contingencies for rivers and harbors, \$250,000, and a lump sum of \$5,000,000 for maintenance and improvement of existing river and harbor work, which makes a total of \$15,870,500, which is very small as compared with the amounts that have been appropriated in past years.

The estimates as originally submitted by the district officers totaled approximately \$51,000,000. We took those estimates and considered them from the point of view of the existing conditions, with a view to cutting out everything that was not absolutely necessary to the prosecution of the war. These estimates were submitted before the armistice was signed. At that time the desire was to cut out all expenditures that were not directly needed for the prosecution of the war.

We also took into consideration the high prices that everything was costing. All kinds of work costs two or three times as much as in ordinary times—before the war.

Still, another thing was the great difficulty in getting dredges or plant for the prosecution of work for the reason that practically all available dredges were working on terminals or slips for the shipyards,

or were engaged in work directly connected with the prosecution of the war.

We took all these things into consideration and cut the total of the estimates of the district officers from \$51,000,000 to \$10,650,500 for specific items. Then we added a lump sum of \$5,000,000 for the reason that we felt sure that in some cases we had cut the estimates down below the amounts that could be advantageously expended, but we could not tell just which ones those would be. We knew there would arise an urgent demand for the prosecution of some of the work, and perhaps more plants would become available, and so perhaps more money would be needed than was estimated for the specific items, and we wanted that lump sum so we could make allotments to carry on that work.

If you will remember, the acts of 1914 and 1915 each provided a lump-sum appropriation, and there is a little of the money appropriated in 1915 unallotted, about \$700,000, and the fact that we had a little of that appropriation available in the last year has enabled us to keep some very urgent work going. We have held on to it and allotted it as sparingly as we could. We felt that with this lump sum of \$5,000,000 we could cut the specific items very much closer than we would otherwise have done.

One case has already come up in which our estimate is shown to be short but that comes before the Committee on Appropriations. It is the improvement for the Mississippi River. The regular estimate is \$10,000,000, which we have been getting. I am now speaking of flood control. After considering what had been spent each year in the last few years, what was on hand, and other conditions, we cut that estimate to \$4,000,000. The commission have recently made their fall trip down the Mississippi River, and we now have specific information from them showing that they need \$6,700,000. There is one case which we have already found cut down too much but we wanted to be on the safe side and cut enough, anyway. We decided we had better be on the safe side and cut too much rather than not enough.

The CHAIRMAN. We will now take up the first district—the Portland, Me., district. There are no improvements in that district for which estimates are made. Are there any general or special observations you desire to make upon any of those items?

Gen. TAYLOR. No, sir; I think not.

The CHAIRMAN. Taking the improvements in that district generally, why are no estimates submitted?

Gen. TAYLOR. Generally speaking, the improvements in the Maine district are fairly well completed. That is shown in the column headed "Percentage of completion." Seven out of 10 improvements are 100 per cent completed, as shown in that column. The harbors in Maine are nearly all of a character which requires relative little maintenance. As you know, it is a very rugged coast, and the harbors once dredged and the project completed, they maintain themselves fairly well.

I do not mean to say that every harbor maintains itself indefinitely. They do require some maintenance. Portland Harbor requires some maintenance, but compared with the harbors on the Gulf coast, the maintenance is extremely small. As the more important ones have been completed comparatively recently, and are in good condition, no estimate was submitted.

The CHAIRMAN. We will proceed to the Boston district. The first improvement there for which you estimate is for Boston Harbor, for maintenance of the 27, 30, and 35 foot channels, and general improvement, \$40,000. For what purpose is that to be used, General, and is it a sufficient amount? That is a very important harbor.

Gen. TAYLOR. The condition of the harbor at the end of the fiscal year is given on pages 113 and 114 of the annual report, volume 1. It is there described in detail. This shows that generally it is in very good condition. On page 117 of the annual report there is given in detail the proposed operations—that is, what will be done with the appropriations. It says, "and an estimate of \$40,000 is submitted for any emergency maintenance of Boston Harbor channels that may become necessary, for repair of the sea walls which are liable to damage by any extraordinarily violent storm, and for maintaining the survey and inspection of boats, and various expenses from the rents of wharves, etc." The survey and inspection boats are quite a large part of the expenses, and they are very necessary in order that we may keep track of what is going on in the harbor and the condition of the channels. It is a fixed expense that has to be maintained, without regard to how much work is done.

The CHAIRMAN. Congress adopted in the act of 1917 the 40-foot entrance channel, and undoubtedly inquiry will be made as to why no estimate is submitted for that. What was the reason for that?

Mr. KENNEDY. There is a note on page 2 of the estimates which says "balances which can be made available will not be sufficient to undertake work on this project, and no operations are contemplated until further funds are appropriated."

Gen. TAYLOR. The reason that was omitted is that we were doubtful about being able to obtain the necessary plant to prosecute the work under the conditions which prevailed. That was one of the projects which had to suffer with others. We have a 35-foot channel there, and commerce can get along. It is not convenient, and the channel is not as deep as it ought to be, but still it is possible to get along with that temporarily.

Mr. KENNEDY. You spoke about a lot of dredges being tied up by shipbuilding. Will those be released now?

Gen. TAYLOR. I am expecting there will be a large number released next summer. I think by next summer we will have no difficulty in obtaining plants.

Mr. KENNEDY. Then any work necessary to be done at the shipyard will have been done by that time?

Gen. TAYLOR. I think so. I know of some dredges that will be released early in the spring, and we are making plans to obtain those dredges.

Mr. BOOHER. Near the bottom of page 2 of the estimate book, in regard to the estimate of \$183,000 for further improvement on the Weymouth Fore River, Mass., there is a note which says, "work on 24-foot channel is about 2 per cent completed. Increase in cost due to war conditions." Is that sufficient to carry on that work?

Gen. TAYLOR. That is the Weymouth Fore River. That is not sufficient to complete that work.

Mr. BOOHER. That ought to be completed.

Gen. TAYLOR. Yes, sir; that is for the deepening of the channel of the Weymouth Fore River. We have taken that up with the Navy Department, and they consider it very urgent work and are asking us to complete it as soon as possible.

Mr. BOOHER. How much would it cost?

Gen. TAYLOR. I think that is an item which should be increased.

The CHAIRMAN. Are you ready at this time to suggest the amount of the increase?

Gen. TAYLOR. No, sir; I should like a little further time to look into it.

Mr. BOOHER. Will you contemplate increasing it sufficiently to complete the work, or simply go ahead more rapidly but not complete it this year?

Gen. TAYLOR. I think it would be advisable to give us money enough to complete it.

Mr. KENNEDY. There is no amount indicated in the column of amounts estimated to complete the work.

Gen. TAYLOR. It was left out because of the increase in prices. Things were unsettled when the estimates were submitted, and there had been no previous estimate. That column of estimates to complete is taken from the previous documents.

Mr. KENNEDY. Of course, it does not indicate the amount that will be needed with the increased prices.

Gen. TAYLOR. No, sir. That project was adopted by the act of 1917, I think, and it was adopted at the request of the Navy Department. I am not certain that there was any previous estimate submitted for it.

The CHAIRMAN. It was adopted in the bill of July, 1916, as is shown on page 139 of the annual report.

Gen. TAYLOR. The estimate to complete will be at least twice that amount of \$300,000. Under existing conditions it would cost at least twice as much as it would have cost in 1914.

Mr. OSBORNE. General, do you apprehend that there will be a lowering of prices, so far as the cost of construction is concerned, very soon?

Gen. TAYLOR. I anticipate that there will be next summer, and that the recent prices will be materially lowered. The price of a dredging plant operation depends on two things, supplies (largely fuel) and labor, as well as the availability of plant. For the past few months there has been so much work that contractors who were engaged in dredging operations were practically getting their own terms. There was far more work necessary for the prosecution of the war than there were dredges for. The result of the scarcity of the dredges was that an emergency dredging committee, as it was called, was formed by the War Industries Board, and they practically fixed the price which dredges should be paid. It was based on the value of the dredge, the cost of operation, etc., and the owner of the dredge was paid so much per day for it, which was practically on the cost-plus basis, basing the value of the dredge on the reproduction cost, which made the cost per day pretty high. I anticipate that will be materially reduced next summer. It will be a long time before we get back to our prices of five years ago, if we ever do.

Mr. KENNEDY. I want to ask a question about the Boston Harbor project. We were told last year that they did not consider it very

urgent, and for that reason no estimate was made to start the work. With the dredges released from the shipyards, would it be advisable at this time to start the work, if it is not urgent, considering the present prices?

Gen. TAYLOR. I believe I should defer it a while longer. There is about a 9-foot tide at Boston, which, with the 35-foot project, gives 44 feet depth at high water, and there are very few vessels that draw 40 feet that have occasion to go into Boston Harbor. The greatest need for a depth greater than 35 feet is due to the fact that in stormy weather a vessel is subject to pitch, and if she does not have plenty of water under the keel, she is likely to strike bottom. But the days of storms and the days of the arrival of big vessels do not happen together very often, and what would happen in such a case would be that the vessel would have to lie outside until high water or until the storm died down. That is something which is not desirable to have happen, as it interferes with the commerce of a big port like Boston.

The CHAIRMAN. General, in view of the importance of Boston Harbor, and the apparent willingness of the commercial industry of Boston to defer any request for an appropriation for this project during war times, I would suggest that you take the matter under consideration, because the committee will surely be interrogated about it, as we wish to give good reason why no appropriation was made for a project adopted in so important a harbor as that of Boston.

Gen. TAYLOR. I will do so.

The CHAIRMAN. The item for Weymouth Fore River, which we discussed a moment ago and which you are taking under advisement, is a part of a group of projects, and the understanding is that whatever is appropriated for any one project in the group may be used for any one of the projects, if the necessity arises. Of course, in reviewing the estimates there you will consider the needs of all the other projects in that particular group at the same time.

Gen. TAYLOR. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. We will proceed to the Newport, R. I., district. There are no estimates submitted for any improvement, in that district. Would you make a general statement as to the reason for that?

Gen. TAYLOR. The projects are fairly along well toward completion and are in fairly good condition. The biggest project in the district is the Pollock Rip Shoals project and no estimate was submitted for that, because it was not very safe to do work on that project during the war because of the submarines. So that work stopped during the war, but under existing conditions I see no reason why we could not go on with that work. There is something like 20,000,000 tons of commerce which goes through the channel there, and the work that we have done there has been a very great benefit to all that commerce.

The CHAIRMAN. The reports will indicate that it is quite valuable.

Gen. TAYLOR. Yes, sir. The work has resulted in straightening the channel to a considerable extent. There was a very crooked channel there and with the conditions which existed, strong tides and frequent fogs, anything we can do to help is desirable.

Mr. BOOHER. What is the estimated cost of completing that contract?