

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

By Patrick Ruckert

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When will this nation get back to work, rebuilding itself and building a future? This magazine presented last week the disaster that is the New York City transportation system. We can traverse the nation and find innumerable infrastructure disasters. The Trump administration this week is holding a series of events to focus on infrastructure. The Democrats in the Congress are talking about their proposed infrastructure program, but have yet to submit a bill.

The President under assault by the combined forces of the British Empire, the intelligence community, the loser element of the Democrats, and the incessant noise of the media, nevertheless has redefined the relations of the United States with the rest of the world. That is good.

Now he must deliver on his promise to make America great again. That simply means putting millions of people to work to build a great nation. It can no longer be a nice slogan. It must deliver results.

The promise of the President to build and rebuild America's infrastructure echoes exactly what President Franklin D. Roosevelt did do, along with his other programs, that not only created the physical economic powerhouse that could fight and win World War II, but saved the lives, and changed the lives, of millions of Americans all through the 1930s.

The American people must stand up and demand that the President and the Congress put up or the continued collapse of the nation will shut them up. That should not and must not be where we are going.

While the President has sounded many of the right notes of the symphony required, as specified by Lyndon LaRouche's Four Laws, the lack of action to carry through threatens to demoralize those who wish him to succeed. President Trump clearly means what he says about returning to the American System of Alexander Hamilton; he clearly means what he says about infrastructure, putting Americans in space again and reindustrializing the nation. He must be pushed to and be allowed to do it.

Yet after decades of mind-numbing environmentalist propaganda, drug usage, and the loss of any sense of being a productive nation, much of our population now accepts that nothing good can be done. Or, if it is done, it won't make much difference anyway.

That may be, but it 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 died when it was necessary that they do so.

The Oroville Dam near catastrophe: A wake up call for 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.



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 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. That was on March 9, and 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 for the nation that one can ignore deteriorating infrastructure for only so long before disaster strikes, 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 four 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 statement. 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. And so 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 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. 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.

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 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)

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 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 inject.

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 catastrophe.