

NOTES FOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TALK  
WAKEFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

Twenty-one years ago, this week, the Great Hurricane of September 21, 1938 struck the Rhode Island coast practically without warning. Hundreds of lives were lost, thousands of cottages and homes were destroyed by flood waters, and the Rhode Island waterfront and beaches were damaged and eroded beyond recognition.

About five years ago another great hurricane struck the Rhode Island coast in August 1954. Although this hurricane was not as severe as the one in 1938, damages to property on the South County shores of Rhode Island have been estimated at more than \$11,000,000.

Recognizing the great loss of life and damages from hurricanes, I supported the surveys by the Corps of Engineers, which Congress authorized to devise practical and economical means of preventing loss of human lives and damages to property by means of sea walls, dams, breakwaters, warning services and other measures which might be required.

The first project authorized under the new Congressional law was for protection of Providence where about \$40,000,000 of flood damage occurred in 1954. Congress promptly appropriated money for design of this \$18,000,000 project, so important to the overall economy of Rhode Island. Construction plans and specifications are now being prepared by the Corps of Engineers, assisted by two Rhode Island engineering firms, so that construction can be initiated in 1961. The Federal Government will bear 70 percent of the total cost of this project while State, City and local people will bear the remaining 30 percent of the cost.

Our immediate concern tonight, however, is the problem of development and protection of the Rhode Island coast. I believe that the various types of Federal projects which can be authorized by Congress for waterfront improvement have been discussed with you. These measures include not only hurricane protection, but also beach erosion control and navigation. (Also on inland rivers, the Federal Government assists in fresh water flood control--protection works are under construction at Woonsocket to protect against disastrous river floods like the August 1955 flood on the Blackstone River which was caused by the intense rainfall of Hurricane Diane.) The usual Federal participation in coastal projects approved by Congress is 70 percent for hurricane protection; 50 percent on small boat harbors, and one-third on beach erosion control for public beach areas.

I am ready to support practical and feasible measures for improvement of the Rhode Island coast. It is up to you gentlemen to determine how the shorelines of Rhode Island should be used and developed. The surveys by the Corps of Engineers are authorized by Congress as they are needed to investigate proposed improvements. After surveys have been made, the Corps of Engineers will recommend to Congress any worthwhile proposals which are needed and desired by the people.

The steady growth of population, new developments on our shores, and the great demand for waterfront property are evident in most coastal communities. Development of the shore is closely related to new highways and transportation. I am informed that the number of boats in Rhode Island is approaching the 30,000 mark, many being used for sport fishing or commercial fishing. Recreation is now recognized as a great industry and

source of income to the State. These widely recognized factors make coastal protection and development all important to the economy of our State. I have no doubt that many measures of improvement now beyond our financial reach will prove practicable and economically feasible in the future as the coastal areas are developed and population grows.

Our neighboring State of Connecticut has an interesting long range approach to waterfront development, although their problems are not as severe as those on the Rhode Island shore.

(1) Beach erosion studies of the Connecticut coast were made by the Corps of Engineers over a twelve year period. The coast was divided into eleven areas, roughly eight miles in length, and a report prepared for each area giving plans for shore development. (Reports are in more detail than South Shore R.I. Report, HD 490, 81st Congress, 2nd Session.) For public beach areas used for recreation, Federal participation in needed beach erosion control measures was authorized by Congress.

(2) The State of Connecticut has requested overall studies of hurricane flood control on the Connecticut shore to develop a master plan and "reservoir" of worthwhile projects with priorities assigned according to need and economic justification. (Similar studies have been made, also, on the principal rivers of Connecticut where severe fresh water flood damages have occurred.)

(3) The State of Connecticut acts as banker for the local people on beach erosion and flood control projects. The legislature has made advance appropriations of several million dollars in order that funds may be made available without delay when a project is approved for construction. As the funds are needed, the State floats bonds to underwrite

the non-Federal costs. Town and local people reimburse the State, making regular payments over a period of years.

(4) When the local people and town officials of a Connecticut community desire to proceed on a project which is included in the overall plan for the State, they advise the State and indicate that the local funds will be available. On beach erosion projects the State proceeds with the preparation of plans and specifications and awards construction contracts. On flood control projects, funds are made available as soon as they are required for construction by the Corps of Engineers.

(5) The cost sharing formula used on beach erosion projects in Connecticut is as follows:

- a. Beach erosion projects, on public property the Federal Government pays 1/3, the State 1/3, and the town 1/3.
- b. Beach erosion projects, on private property the State pays 1/3, and 2/3 is paid by the private property owners.
- c. On flood control and navigation projects, the State handles non-Federal costs in a similar manner.

I am not proposing that Rhode Island put such methods into effect, but it is of considerable interest to look over the fence into our neighbor's yard.

Among the most significant shore developments which have been made on the Rhode Island coast, with the assistance of the Federal Government, are those in the Point Judith Pond area, here in the towns of South Kingstown and Narragansett. In my opinion, there is no question that these developments are an important part of the Rhode Island economy. This area is one of the most active areas on our coast for boating, fishing, and other recreational use.

I read with interest, while I was in Washington, of the tuna derbies -- the great number of sport fishing boats from all sections of the Atlantic Coast and crowds of people attracted to the area.

I was interested also in learning that navigational use of Point Judith Pond is now ten times the estimate of prospective commerce made about 10 years ago when enlargement of the project was recommended. The dynamic effect on the local economy is evident.

The first Federal improvement made at Point Judith, of course, was the construction at the turn of the century of the large breakwaters that create the Harbor of Refuge. On an inspection of coastal projects which I made last year, we noticed that these breakwaters are badly in need of repair after severe damages by hurricanes and other storms. The Corps of Engineers was apprised of the need for repair, and maintenance funds for this project have been recommended.

The improvements at Point Judith Pond also include dredged anchorage and channel areas and jetties. The authorized Federal work was completed in 1950 at a cost of about \$2,500,000. Federal maintenance work was done last year at about the same time the State marine area was enlarged.

The Public Works Committee of the Senate authorized a survey of further navigational improvements in the Point Judith Pond area, and last December I attended the public hearing held by the Corps of Engineers at Wakefield and spoke in favor of further improvements. The plan which you proposed to the Army Engineers at that hearing, included navigation improvements and also hurricane protection. I have been informed that the Army Engineers survey is moving forward and their plans and estimates

for navigation and hurricane protection will be available in the near future for discussion with town and State officials and other interested parties.

You will recall that the recreational improvement of Sand Hill Cove Beach in the Harbor of Refuge, by placing sand fill and construction of groins, was accomplished by the State. I have obtained an appropriation of \$40,000 to reimburse the State for the Federal share of the cost of this work.

A Federal study was completed last year of beach improvement in the Matunuck Beach Recreational Area, recently acquired by the State of Rhode Island. This report recommends beach widening and raising as a part of the State plan for development of this area. Federal participation in this beach erosion control project was approved by the House but did not clear the Senate in the last session of Congress. I expect that this work will be included in the next Omnibus Bill for civil works.

Next, I want to touch upon some of the other Federal studies on the South Shore of Rhode Island in order that you may be informed of these activities.

Annonaug Cove - A navigation project was recommended by the Corps of Engineers and included in the Civil Works Omnibus Bill. I expect that it will be approved by Congress next year.

Wickford Harbor - Studies are well advanced and plans for navigation improvement are ready for discussion with State and town in the near future.

Narragansett Pier - I am informed that the Corps of Engineers has submitted an advance draft report to Washington on a project combining

hurricane flood control, beach protection and navigation improvement.

This is the first report submitted under the new hurricane survey authorized by Congress which would include navigation and beach protection studies.

Watch Hill Cove - A navigation study involving enlarged anchorage area, jetty and breakwater is well advanced. The Corps of Engineers is about ready, I believe, to discuss possible improvements with State and local people.

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Close by repeating the thoughts: I have a strong interest in shore development and protection; stand ready to support feasible projects; up to you people to decide how the R. I. shores are to be used and developed.