
II. The Grand Design

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

by Patrick Ruckert

July 7—On June 29, just days after a subway derailment in New York City that 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 collapsed in February and threatened a catastrophic flood, forcing 180,000 people to flee for their lives. There are hundreds of potential infrastructure disasters just as dramatic, or even more so, across the length and breath of the nation.

As *EIR* has reported, and demanded, again and again, the President must hear a loud and clear call from the American people, that nothing less will work, than enacting a full, Hamiltonian credit system to fund \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion per year for repairing and building the nation's infrastructure, and creating 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 are 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 the system are 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 jobs, lasting 25 years, building NAWAPA. (See the [NAWAPA XXI Animated Overview](#).)

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 American 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



William Croyle/California Department of Water Resources

An aerial photo shows the damaged spillway and eroded hillside at Oroville Dam.

are important because they contribute to building, growing, and manufacturing all that we all require to live and what the future requires—has produced the fatal illusion 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, are not a condition created by God. So, grab your future in your own hands, and join with the 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.

Oroville, New York City, the Nation

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 limitations, can and will die when it is necessary that they do so.

My article in the March 3, 2017 issue of *EIR*, “[Oroville Dam’s Near Catastrophe: A Wake Up Call for the Nation](#),” 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 led 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 is NOT A Drill. This is NOT A Drill. This is NOT A Drill.”

Soon, 188,000 people were in their cars, jamming the roads and becoming more and more panic stricken as authorities were warning over emergency broadcast networks, 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 millions in New York City, the prospect of finding themselves stuck in a broken-down subway car is terrifying. Meanwhile, even the ability to get to work in the morning has become a crap-shoot.

The near-catastrophe in California 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 farmland.

Immediately, the water-flow down the damaged spillway was stopped, and the water level in the reservoir behind the dam began to rise. Then it overflowed 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 which demonstrates that ignoring 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 broke, 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 have been no years-long studies of the problem, no drawn-out court battles delaying construction, and no bureaucratic or other delaying actions 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, which had washed into the Feather River, had been removed. That job had been done on a 24 hours a day, seven days a week schedule.

The construction contract to rebuild both the broken spillway and the emergency spillway was awarded to the Kiewit Corporation, 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 a 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 of repairing other damages resulting from the emergency that are 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 emergency funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)



California Department of Water Resources

Concrete reinforcement being applied to the emergency spillway of the Oroville Dam during the crisis at the dam in 2017.

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.

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.