

# 'We've Had 40 Years of Total Disregard For the Future—And We're Paying for It'

*Michael Parker has been a five-term U.S. Representative from Mississippi, 1989-99; and served as Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) from October 2001 until March 2002. President George W. Bush asked Parker to resign as Army Corps chief because of Parker's public criticism of significant cuts Bush was making to the Army Corps budget for economic infrastructure. Parker was interviewed on Sept. 21 by Richard Freeman, about the disastrous impact of Hurricane Katrina on infrastructure, and the principles for reconstruction.*



**EIR:** You've just returned from Mississippi. What does the post-Katrina situation look like?

**Parker:** It's very much worse than [other areas]. . . . The fact of the matter is, Mississippi's got much more devastation, even though they had less loss of life. And to give you an example: In Hurricane Andrew, which was one of the largest hurricanes—largest as far as debris—in our recorded history, there were 17 million cubic yards of debris. This time, it's going to be over 80 million yards. So, it's going to be four or five times larger than any other hurricane we've ever had in terms of debris. And Mississippi is just devastated, because it just took away so much of the business on the coast, especially from the gaming industry, which makes up 15-20% of the income of the state, now. So, that is a *devastating* blow to any state, especially one with one of the lowest per capita incomes of any state in the country. It's devastating. . . .

But one of the things it did show, I think more than anything else, was the lack of preparedness we have as a nation. . . . And especially after four years, after 9/11, you would have thought we would be more prepared. But, it just goes to show that the Department of Homeland Security does not have its act together. And that's got to be reviewed, now.

What is interesting, though, is that, in actuality, this is the type of thing where the government has a direct interest. And I think, for the first time, people are learning some things. I mean, our parents and grandparents knew it. But all of a sudden, this generation is learning some things that it has never

known before, and that is, that there's a direct correlation between standard of living and infrastructure. And one of the things that the government is charged with—we've become such a short-term, instant gratification society—that is our elected officials are supposed to be charged with the responsibility of looking to the future, and providing for the security of the nation.

And one of the ways you do that, is, to put in place things, that are not for your generation, but for future generations. The infrastructure that we have in place today, is a gift that we've been given from our parents and grandparents. The infrastructure that we build and maintain—it's not for us; it's for our children and grandchildren.

But politicians would rather pass a prescription drug bill, which does no one any good, and nobody likes it, and it is extremely expensive; rather than taking that same money, and putting it in infrastructure that would pay dividends for years to come. A lot of people have said, "Well, what could President Bush have done?" President Bush could not have done anything to prevent this. He's going to be judged, as far as what he does for infrastructure in another five to ten years from now. Because you're not judged for what you do—you can't be judged now, because he's only been in office for four and a half years. The infrastructure that you put into place, these are projects that are not short-term. You don't just go and build them in a year, two years. These are long-term projects. And they take 5, 10, 15, 20 years to put into place. So, he's going to be judged later.

What we're receiving, is 40 years of total disregard for the future—and we're paying the price. All debt is going to be repaid. It's kind of like going to buy a car, and you borrow the money. Either you're going to pay the notes, or they're going to come and repossess it. But either way, the debt's going to be satisfied. And we're in the same situation in this: We didn't pay the notes.

**EIR:** We have written in our magazine, that, actually starting in the mid-'60s, America started to have a paradigm shift from a producer society to a consumer society. And what got lost, is the infrastructure; because people say, "It's not on the balance sheet, therefore, we don't suffer a loss."

**Parker:** It is on the balance sheet. The problem is, we've decided that we liked the idea of utilizing—you've got current assets and long-term assets—things for the short term, and



USACE Photograph/Adrien Lamarre

*"There is a direct correlation between standard of living and infrastructure," said Parker. Instead, "we've become such a short-term, instant gratification society. . . . The infrastructure that we build and maintain—it's not for us; it's for our children and grandchildren." Shown here is a military tow on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway.*

you forget about those long-term assets that you have to put in place, and the investment that you have to make. The balance sheet stays the same.

And, if you looked at the bottom line, you'd say, "Well, we've invested all this money!" But, what kind of assets did we use? And, if you looked at a P&L [profit and loss statement], that's what's interesting, because all of these things that we've invested in are really not assets, they're actually just expenses.

**EIR:** Rather than making investments for capital account, for investment account.

**Parker:** That's right.

**EIR:** On the Mississippi River, the Army Corps of Engineers was building a vital flood protection system during the '30s, '40s, and '50s. And aside from what's happened now in New Orleans—which is extremely important, critical—the lower Mississippi River system itself did not suffer overflowing. The Tenn-Tom [Tennessee Tombigbee waterway] was another river system that was built. The states of Mississippi and Alabama were asking for it to be built in the '50s. It was put off, and finally built later. It's quite valuable. What's the history that you look at? What's the outlook that you look at, some of the projects you think were worthwhile?

**Parker:** Well, I'll give you an example: If you turn around and you look in Brownsville, Texas—and everybody's talking about all the poor in New Orleans, and it's true, the poor in New Orleans suffered, greatly—but let's look at Brownsville, Texas: You have got the Rio Grande river coming down; you have a thing called *resacas*, which is the Spanish term for ox-

bow lakes, they're a natural phenomenon. Through the years, that's been built up over there, and silted in. It hasn't been maintained, because you had more and more people live there. And the water used to come in and flush it out, but now you got all these buildings. And if you look down there, you've got 200,000 people in Brownsville and a million right across the river in Matamoros [Mexico], so you got a very large group of people, the vast majority very poor.

Those *resacas* are utilized for flood control, for water storage, that type of thing. If you had a hurricane—and right now, I'm worried about it [Hurricane Rita] going over to Brownsville: Because, if you had a direct hit going into Brownsville, or if it went to the south of Brownsville so that the hard right-edge would hit them, you could have the same type of flooding that you've got in New Orleans.

And you say, "Well, what could solve that?" You need to go in, and re-create those *resacas*. Go in, and dig them out, have the water storage, be able to have the flood control. We're not talking about something that's going to cost tremendous amounts of money. Over a period of 10 years, they could be done; the total cost would probably be \$20-25 million. But you would do it slowly; each year you would do a little.

**EIR:** Have the *resacas* deteriorated?

**Parker:** They deteriorated; but we haven't been able to get the government to put money in it. I'm just telling you of another area, where there's a problem.

If we don't do this type of project—and there are projects like this all over the country—if we don't do that, and then we have a disaster hit Brownsville, we're going to have to

## Critical Ready-To-Go Waterways Infrastructure Projects



Sources: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Waterways Council, Inc.; *EIR*.

come and spend, just untold amounts of money to get it resolved! It makes no common sense. Evidently, people have gotten so smart, they've gotten stupid—I don't know.

**EIR:** You're familiar with NAFTA. One of the things about NAFTA, is simply to move goods. You have cities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border, and the only thing that the supporters of NAFTA have been concerned about is to build bridges, so that the goods can get from one side to the other. But there are all sorts of fundamental infrastructure not built, as you just mentioned with Brownsville. These questions are

not being addressed.

**Parker:** If the Corps of Engineers were funded at a full capability level—which right now would be about \$6.5 billion a year—you say, "Well, that's a lot of money." It is a lot of money. But when you look at what we spent, \$2 billion a day—say the burn rate is *\$2 billion a day*? Well, I've got news for you. You could fund the Corps a *long* time, on that. And especially since they've been funded \$2 billion a year (every year) *less* than they should have. You could make a *tremendous* difference in infrastructure.

And it's the same way on the highway program: We've

got all these entitlement programs, which have not been successful, have not served the purpose that had been envisioned for them, and then we fuss about the money we're going to put in the highway bill, in infrastructure. Now, granted, there's pork in there to some degree—there are “projects” out there. But, on the whole, the highway bill is necessary for this country.

And people forget, when you say, “at what point did it change?”: In the '50s, we had the national interstate highway program—

**EIR:** Under Eisenhower, right.

**Parker:** It was put together, and Eisenhower sold it as a defense concept. You know, it was the interstate defense system [National Defense Highway System], to be used in time of war—I have to tell you, and even with that, we had an interstate in Alaska, and also in Hawaii. But that doesn't matter. That helped this country, as far as being able to move the standard of living, to keep it moving forward. It is necessary that we understand that there is a *direct correlation* between standard of living and infrastructure, and what you invest. And if you do not invest, your standard of living can not be maintained.

And what happens when a society can not maintain its standard of living? All you have to do, is look at New Orleans: Within 72 hours, you can move from modern city, to a Third World country, because infrastructure failed. That's all you have to do: Just look at New Orleans. That's what happens when infrastructure can't be maintained. You will have chaos in society.

**EIR:** You used the \$6.5 billion figure: How did you determine that? Is that just full capability?

**Parker:** That's full capability. When I was ASACW, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works—which is head of the Corps—that's what I went to OMB [Office of Management and Budget], and that's what I asked for: “I want \$6.4 billion.”

**EIR:** In 2002, at a Congressional hearing, they asked you about the Army Corps budget, and you said, “Well, this may be utopian, I think, but this is what I think we should do.” You asked for 150% of the budget proposed. Well, you got hung from a tree. And your forced resignation was done, I think, very publicly, both against you, but also as a warning: “If anyone else tries it, this is what's going to happen.”

**Parker:** I think it sent a message to everybody. Look, I don't fault the President for doing it. And the reason I don't, is because he's Commander-in-Chief; he's the President of the United States. I was serving at his pleasure. If he didn't like what I was doing, he should let me go. I have no problem with that.

**EIR:** But, you had projects in mind. If I remember, one of

them was for Mississippi. What were some of the projects you had in mind?

**Parker:** From the standpoint of getting involved in individual projects, to me it makes more sense to look at it nationally. We have had cities in the “Upper Miss” that have flooded.

**EIR:** Right, the '93 flood, north of Cairo, Illinois.

**Parker:** They have done everything that everybody's asked them to do. They've done everything EPA asked them to do. They've done everything that the Corps has asked them to do: And now, it comes time to do what's necessary to protect them, and we can't get the money for that! I was talking to Collin Peterson from Minnesota, who's a member of Congress, and said, “Collin, have you been able to do anything?” And he said, “No! Can't get it—” and they need \$15 million—\$15 *million*, and can't get it!

People do not understand. I had a news thing on CNN the other day with a commentator, and I was trying to talk about the budget, and its effects. And he just cut me off, saying, “There are not ten people in the country, who understand the budget. They don't care.” And I'm thinking—and I *wanted* to say to him, “Well, that's why we're in the mess we're in.” Because, it doesn't matter what you have as policy. If you don't *fund* the policy, it doesn't exist. And the fact of the matter is, is that, if you don't put money in the right areas—I don't care what your intentions are—nothing positive is going to happen. It's *hard* to get people to understand that.

**EIR:** We looked at about 40-50 projects which are authorized for the Corps and not appropriated. . . .

**Parker:** We actually have about \$40 *billion* worth of projects that have been authorized and not funded. . . . There are some projects that should not be funded, I understand there are some that should.

**EIR:** Like which ones?

**Parker:** If we had put in place a surge-protection barrier, where the Lake Pontchartrain goes out into open water. If we'd have put that in—it was deemed at the time too expensive and the environmentalists hated it—if we'd have put that in place, you wouldn't have had the surge. Remember, what I have been told—and they're going to do a forensic study of this whole thing—but what I've been told, is that when the surge came in, that's not when the levees were breached. *It's when it came back*. So, the surge came in. When it came back is when it went over and killed the levee.

**EIR:** Okay, so it goes from Lake Borgne, into Ponchartrain—

**Parker:** Then it goes into Maurepas, and it goes up that way. And then it comes back. And that's when it was breached. I have now talked to some guys who have seen some of the levees and some of the structures that were in place. You look at the structure, and it looks like water kept coming over,

beating down, weakening the other side, and then when it came back, it blew it over.

**EIR:** Now, one of the proposals that's been on the table is to build this sea-gate at the eastern end of Lake Pontchartrain, and then have it close when you know there's a storm coming.

**Parker:** As surge protection. You would close it when you had a surge.

**EIR:** When did people start talking about that?

**Parker:** It was done in the early '70s; they did a study. It was recommended by the Corps; the local sponsors felt it was a really good thing to do. I wasn't around then, but I understand that the environmentalists threw a fit. And the sponsors couldn't afford to fight all this.

The environmentalists, you know, their hands are not clean in this thing. They have created all kinds of problems, any time you wanted to do anything. And now, they're sheepishly saying, "Oh, no! That's not what we meant to do." Well, they can say that all day long: They've been a hindrance on everything. Because the Corps knows it's going to get sued every time it turns around. I mean, they're used to it. It doesn't matter what they do; the environmentalists won't come around.

But, the fact of the matter is, is that what seemed so expensive at the time, now pales in comparison to where we are—*pales* in comparison.

**EIR:** Are you saying that the sea-gate was actually part of a plan, back—?

**Parker:** Well, there were several different plans. You had SELA, the Southeast Louisiana plan. It was really after Hurricane Betsy in '65, that's when a lot of the work started being done. When Betsy came in, then members of Congress starting going to the Corps, and saying, "Give us some ideas of things that can be done for protection." Because Betsy was *devastating* to New Orleans. They didn't have the type of flooding that you had this time, but it was still devastating. And they said, "we need something." And the Corps engineers started looking at different models, and different things, and they came up with different concepts of what could be done.

**EIR:** Do you know who I could talk to, who might know about this? The other day Bennett Johnston, the former Senator from Louisiana, said that he wants to try and revive a policy for flood protection for New Orleans, but I haven't been able to locate people who might know the old plans.

**Parker:** Well, Bennett came after that period of time; Bennett was in the late '70s. We're talking 40 years ago! Bud Schuster came after that. I'm talking about these old bulls that were around here. And they fought for it: I'm telling you, they understood. But the longer we've gone, the fewer people thought long term. It's all short-term stuff, now. Nobody thinks long term.

**EIR:** Let me ask you about this: I went back and I got two editorials. On the one hand, you had tremendous defense from people when you were fired, or asked to resign. On the other side, you seem to have forced, I guess you would call it a "left-right coalition." Because the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* both went after you. The *Wall Street Journal*, wrote an editorial March 11, 2002, titled "Martyr for Pork." And they cited—on your situation—[Mississippi Republican Sen.] Trent Lott speaking favorably; they cited [Alabama Republican Rep.] Sonny Callahan, and they cited Jim Oberstar, Minnesota Democrat, who at the time said, "It's one of the darkest hours in the 226 years of the Corps." Then they say—this is the *Wall Street Journal*—"forgive us if we interrupt this patriotic funeral music with a few facts. The Army Corps is not fighting and dying in Afghanistan." And it said, that the key thing, is to take the money from these projects and use it for the fight on terrorism.

**Parker:** Would they say that now?

Now, let me ask you a question. Three weeks ago—three weeks ago, my son proposed to his fiancée in New Orleans. You could have walked up to anybody in New Orleans and talked about the Corps of Engineers, and pork, and they would agree with the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*. "Pork. That's all it is. Building all this stuff, just a waste of taxpayers' money."

Move forward one week: Walk up to *anybody* in New Orleans—I don't care who it is. I don't care if it's the most uneducated person you ever met, or an engineer, or a law professor at Tulane—and look at them and say, "Do you believe flood protection and levee protection is pork?" And this city is full of water. I guarantee you, that you wouldn't find one person that would say, "It's pork."

What I find interesting: All of a sudden, everything else is pork, but now *this* is not pork. So, if they want to be honest with themselves, they need to say, "Maybe we've been looking at this wrong way."

**EIR:** Let me just take it from the other side, because this is the *New York Times*, in a 2002 article called, "Touching the Untouchable Corps." which talks about that you were fired for asking for "too much money." And then, they quoted leading "advocacy organizations," American Rivers, Environmental Defense Fund, and Earth Justice!

**Parker:** Oh, amen! And as long as I've got Trent Lott and Jim Oberstar and Sonny Callahan that say I'm right, and I've got these environmentalist groups saying I'm wrong, then I must be correct. I'm not worried.

**EIR:** A transportation expert in Washington, D.C. told us that when he was studying back in the '60s, with cost-benefit analysis, first you looked at the benefit of what you were going to produce, and then you figured out what the cost was for making it. He said, this has been stood on its head, where now you won't build anything, unless you can get the cost down.

**Parker:** Well, first of all, you don't do any cost-benefit analysis on environmental projects. They're not allowed, when it comes down to building these projects, whether it be highways, bridges. One of the reasons they're so expensive, is not because the Federal agencies want to do it that way. They've been told by Congress to do it that way: "You *will* follow these guidelines. You *will* put all these rules and regulations in place." And it costs a lot of money to do that.

I'll give you an example: We had a situation on the Coast, after Katrina, in New Orleans, where a regulator comes up, from the Corps, to a contractor, saying, "You're using the wrong tickets." This is for debris removal. Every time that you have a load, they have to keep tabs of that load. And there's certain information that's required to be put on. And the guy said, "You have to have Corps tickets." And the guy said, "I tried to get Corps tickets. Y'all don't have any. Give me your tickets!"

The Corps guy said, "We don't have any—they're in St. Louis."

The contractor said, "Well, my ticket is exactly the same as yours. My company's name's at the top of it. Yours has got the Corps at the top of it, but it has the same information."

The Corps guy said, "If you don't have Corps tickets, we're shutting your job down." This was down in Louisiana. What's interesting is, this guy had to send an airplane to St. Louis, from Florida, to pick up the tickets to bring it to him, so he wouldn't shut down hundreds of subcontractors who were removing debris! All because of the ticket.

Now look: Those regulations were not put in place by the Corps. Awh! We had a situation in New York, after 9/11, where—and I won't get into any names—we were trying to remove debris, and the Corps was instrumental in putting together everything to remove the debris. We needed another pier, to bring the barges in, and put the stuff in to take it to Fresh Kill [the landfill designated for 9/11 debris]. And we needed to do a dredging, to dredge it so the barge could get in there and they could put the material in. And there was a guy from the EPA, who said, "We may need to have an environmental impact study" which would take six months. And the question was then posed to him, "Do you want to have a news conference, so that *you* can tell everybody you want to have a six-month stay?" He said, "Well, maybe we don't."

**EIR:** If you had the funding, what would be some of the projects you would build? We think the Corps budget should be increased ten times.

**Parker:** No. They can't. They couldn't handle it. They don't have the capability. . . . The Corps doesn't build anything. It contracts. It's one of the largest contracting units of the Federal government. What happens is, and I mean, there is always the case that you can go too far, and create just as much harm, as not doing it the correct way.

Just as when you build a bridge, you build in a systematic way, you build projects the same way, taking into consider-

ation everything: They consider all the benefits, all the environmental, the sociological, the cultural side. You have to look at it from a holistic standpoint, and you have to be *very* methodical when you do it.

What needs to be done, is, you fund the Corps at their capability level, which right now is about \$6.5 billion—and these projects are not short term, they're long-term. And you have it just the way you do the highways. One reason the interstate highway system has been so effective is: They've got 5-year plans, 10-year plans, 15-year plans, 20-year plans; 25-year plans and 50-year plans! I mean, they've got all these plans out in the future. The difference is, they've got a funding source, because of the taxes on gasoline and everything, the excise taxes. They have a *fund*.

We don't have that. The water system in this country, with the Corps, is at the whim of Congress, "what we're going to let you have." And if anything good comes out of this, I'm hoping that people will say, "We need to have a plan in place. We fund the Corps at their capability level, and they have 5-, 10-, 15-, 20-year plans in place. They have an operations and maintenance budget that is large enough to make sure we take care of the locks and dams."

We have got a *tremendous* problem with dams in this country, and it's going to come back to bite us. The *Washington Post* had an article saying, New Orleans was not the most dangerous situation we've got in the country. Sacramento is. Well, that's interesting, because, Sacramento has got *tremendous* problems there, that need to be addressed.

And, you have to understand, the Corps does nothing by itself. Normally, the Corps has sponsors out there, which have a vested interest, and they pay part of the money! Local participation.

**EIR:** We looked at some of the projects on the waterways in the recent spending bills, and they were able to get work on a few locks and dams, I think four on the Upper Mississippi, two on the Illinois, into the Water Resources Development Act for this year—

**Parker:** Which is an authorization, not an appropriation. Now, there's a long way between saying, "yeah, we're going to do that," and getting it funded.

**EIR:** But there are a series of projects, on the Ohio River, for example—

**Parker:** And the majority of the water that comes down the Mississippi comes from the Ohio.

**EIR:** These projects are still sitting there. And they got moved back. The OMB says, "Well, the way we're going to do it is this: We give every project this cost-benefit ratio. Those that have the highest ratio, get the money, because we want to make sure projects are completed. We don't want to do them partially." I called and asked the OMB, "Okay, well, what happens with projects that show a positive cost-benefit

ratio, but are not the highest, and are essential?" The person said to me, "We've got projects that are 3.5 benefit to cost, but they are not going to get funded, because they weren't the highest."

**Parker:** Yeah, but why? Why is that the case? It's because OMB has been instrumental in keeping the Corps underfunded. I mean, the one person down there who is the problem is a guy named Gary Waxman. And Bob Woodward asked me, he said, "Give me names." I said, "Gary Waxman, OMB."

If you want to know the person who had more to do with the problems we've got in this country in water, talk to Gary Waxman. Get him to tell, *why* he has done so many things to thwart projects that are needed in this country.

**EIR:** If you had the money for these projects, and you had the all resources to let out the contracts—

**Parker:** You would not see the difference in another one or two years, but starting in five, eight, ten years, you'd start seeing a difference. And if you were consistent at it, in 20 years, you would see a *massive* change.

I'm going to give you something from the standpoint of *my* feeling about trade: To maintain the standard of living of the people of the United States—and I understand, any time a culture falls, a society falls, it falls because the standard of living of the people can't be maintained. Go through history, and look at every society.

In this country, when we were formed, we basically told England, "You're taking all of our assets. You're not leaving us what we need, to have a standard of living for a lot of people the way it needs to be done. We don't have the freedom we should have. Therefore, we are going to change." And we did. To maintain the standard of living, you must be able to have the infrastructure in place to have that standard of living.

And let's talk about trade. . . . There was a time, when, on the average, we had to double trade every 20 years to maintain our standard of living. Well, to be on track to double trade, you have to be able to move that trade. And since we are a society where most of our trade on the import side comes over water, and also since we're a society where a lot of trade has to go into the interior of the country, we utilize water. It's the cheapest way to move large amounts of goods.

Basically, 35% of all our trade comes through Long Beach and Los Angeles Harbors. And it's put on trucks and rail and it goes from there out through the country. So, if you walk into a Wal-Mart, you can pretty much rest assured, that 35% of the stuff in there came through L.A. and Long Beach.

Well, to do that, you've got to invest in infrastructure to *move* that trade. And if you have to do it on water, you have to have the ports, and you have to have the facilities, and you have to have the terminals, and you have to have the equipment to make that work; and you have to have a tie-in to the road system and the rail system in this country to make it work: Look how we have underfunded our harbors and ports. Just look at it!

What does that do? That creates a situation where there's going to come a time, when we *need* the trade, but we don't have the facilities in order to move it, either in or out. When that occurs, then the standard of living of the people will decrease. And when that happens, you have political chaos.

**EIR:** It was very clear in 2002 that [then-OMB Director] Mitch Daniels just blew up when you said, "Fund the Corps at \$6.4 billion." And he was going to make sure, because his whole system would "come apart," if he allowed this to go through.

**Parker:** Internally, I did everything that I could, trying to explain to people: There's no difference in the way OMB is looking at things—there's no difference, now, between what the Democrats did, and what the Republicans did—I see no difference. Neither one is making the right decisions.

And I was going to say, this transcends party, it's non-political. OMB is the only constant thing we've got in our government. . . . They've become more and more powerful over a period of time, and they've made the decision that they know best what this country needs. And elected officials be damned. . . .

See, I'm one of these people that believe this: I believe that you can not make a decision unless you have the right information. I believe there's a place for OMB! A lot of people don't think I think that—but I do! . . .

**EIR:** Did you talk with any of these fellows? I saw one example where you walked into Daniels' office with two different—

**Parker:** Pieces of steel. What I did was, I was trying—I wasn't doing well verbally [laughs]. So, I said, "Maybe if he saw what this is." So, I instructed the Corps, "I need a piece of steel that has been in the water, on a lock that we're replacing. I want a piece of that steel. And I want a brand new piece of steel." And I had these two pieces of steel. One of them was an inch and a quarter thick, or an inch thick; and the other was *falling* apart!

And I laid them on Mitch's desk, and I said, "These two pieces of steel are the same type steel, exactly. This one's been in the water 35 years, should have been replaced 10 years ago. And this one is brand new." I said: "Mitch, it doesn't matter whether a terrorist blows up this lock, or if it falls down because it won't work, we haven't maintained it. Either way, it doesn't work! At least with a terrorist, we got somebody to blame! If we don't maintain it, the only people we can blame is ourselves. Do you understand?"

He got furious.

**EIR:** Do you think that there was an emphasis that shifted, for example in FEMA, away from the type of preparedness that we used to have for natural events, to focus on terrorism?

**Parker:** I'm going to tell you something that I believe: The career people at FEMA, and people that I've worked with

there, are sharp. And if you'll notice, a lot of the career people have left FEMA. And you have to ask, Why? . . . And if you talk to the career people, who are very talented—and say, “Why did you leave?” Almost universally, I think they'll tell you: “I couldn't stand it any more. I couldn't stand, and take it in an agency which had so much potential, and was just being inept.”

**EIR:** But, do you think some of this emphasis on terrorism excluded infrastructure?

**Parker:** I think you have to have both of them, now. I think they're both vital. They both have to be done. Both of them.

**EIR:** Do you think FEMA acted quickly enough?

**Parker:** No.

I don't think our Federal government did. I don't think state and local governments did.

**EIR:** Do you think an approach like Roosevelt's would be workable? Do you think a Marshall Plan would be workable? In other words, something that didn't just give out vouchers to people, and said, “find housing.”

**Parker:** If you turn around and you expect the government to do all of this, you're going to be *sorely* disappointed. The government has got to bring in the private sector, and create the entities to make this thing happen. The private sector is the only force we have in the country, that is strong enough, vital enough, robust enough, and can cut through the red tape enough to make things happen. But, you *have* to allow the private sector to do, what it has to do.

**EIR:** Would you move to do a more accelerated pace of the infrastructure which should have been done for the last 40 years?

**Parker:** Of course. The first thing I would do, is take the model that was used after the earthquake in San Francisco, where a *tremendous* amount of damage was done to the infrastructure. Instead of creating a housing czar, like they're talking about doing in FEMA, I would create the same type of situation on infrastructure that we had in San Francisco, and just transport it over to the Gulf Coast. . . . They built everything back much faster than everybody anticipated: The Corps of Engineers handled all the contracts.

Basically, they turned around and put incentives in place for the private sector to build these things faster. To move things, they cut through a lot of the red tape, put waivers on a lot of different regulations, and just *did it*.

**EIR:** Because they had to rebuild portions of the highway.

**Parker:** Oh, they had massive portions! Bridges and everything else. . . . Then they turned around and did all the contracting. Put all the contracts in place to make it happen. The same thing needs to be done on the Gulf Coast—exactly.

**EIR:** Railroads: We've looked at the question of electrifying our railroads—having electric locomotives, instead of electric-petroleum hybrids. They're much faster and cut down on petroleum use. What do you think about the rail situation in the country?

**Parker:** I think it has deteriorated over a period of time, also. The only area of the country where it's truly robust, is on the Eastern Seaboard, because you move so many people up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

**EIR:** Would you take some of those projects, and start to try to move them forward?

**Parker:** Yes. And I like [Indiana Republican Rep. Mike] Pence's idea of getting rid of the prescription drug bill. I like him. He said, just roll it back, get rid of it.

**EIR:** And then use these funds, for these things?

**Parker:** For infrastructure. He was talking about using it for New Orleans.

**EIR:** Who else is talking about infrastructure, in a way that you think is useful?

**Parker:** Right now, nobody is—yet. They really haven't focussed on it. And one of the reasons I'm focussed on it, is because, I paid a heckuva price to talk about it. I haven't talked about it in three years! I have a consulting business, where I work with clients around the country, to talk about infrastructure. And I work with them on trying to get infrastructure put in place. But I haven't said anything in three years, and the *reason* I haven't said anything, because, it would have all been sour grapes. Now, all of a sudden, people want to talk.

**EIR:** How did you get interested in this?

**Parker:** Number one, I've been in business all my life. . . . I have to maintain my infrastructure to provide for my employees. And through the years, I've had businesses, and I've had to invest money in things that I really didn't want to spend the money on! I mean, because, I could just put a new water system into my business—nobody could see it. They still had water. They didn't know I'd spent all that money, but I did! And there's no difference in maintaining your business, than in maintaining this country: It's still assets, your long-term assets, that you have to take care of.

And so, when I got into Congress, the first committee I was on, was Transportation and Infrastructure. At that time, it was called the Public Works Committee. And then, I was moved to the Corporations Committee, and I sat on the Energy and Water Subcommittee for Corporations. Since that was where I was put, that's where I started putting my emphasis—and I started learning about it.

The sad thing is, very few people in Congress understand water, and how vital it is. And what I always felt was, in the last 100 years, we have fought a lot of wars over oil and



energy. I think in the next 100 years, we're going to wind up fighting wars over water. And, internally in this country, water is going to be a real problem. We had a water problem out West. We always have. Mark Twain said, "Whisky's for drinking, water's for fighting." Well, that same problem that we had out West, which is historical in nature, we now have on the Eastern Seaboard. And Atlanta's a perfect example.

And we're going to have internal dissension, in this country, because of water. And we're going to *international* dissension, because of water. . . .

**EIR:** If you had the ability to do something now, what would you recommend be done, for example?

**Parker:** I would fully fund the Corps at its capability. I would *publicly* make a point of having the whole water question be totally nonpartisan. And I don't know how you make people understand that it needs to be nonpartisan. It *used* to be nonpartisan. The Public Works Committee used to be the most nonpartisan committee—

**EIR:** Really? Even into early '90s?

Parker. Oh, yes—even into the early '90s. Over a period of time. It was still nonpartisan in the late '80s and early '90s, and then just began to change.

But infrastructure is not a partisan issue. These are investments that we make. And it should be looked at the same way, that you sit down and have a professional look at your accounting, or your legal situation. You have professionals that sit down and say: "Okay, these are things that need to be done. These are the negatives if we don't do them. These are the benefits that are there." And we need to restructure how we determine what is needed.

If you look at the Tenn-Tom [Tennessee-Tombigbee River Waterway, from the Ohio River to the Port of Mobile]: They don't give anything to Tenn-Tom, but a lot of the stuff that comes down Tenn-Tom is very high-tech in nature. It's not heavy, but it's high-tech. And so, the value is very great—the weight is not great. But you can't move it on the roads, it's too large.

I'll give you an example: They don't give anything to NASA, because they go by *tonnage*. This is NASA stuff and different types of technology, which goes down the Tenn-Tom. So you can have a very expensive, high-tech thing being boated down, and it gets *nothing*, even though it probably employed more people, and is more expensive. And you can take a lot of rocks, and OMB gives them more value than they do the high-tech stuff.

**EIR:** Why hasn't Tenn-Tom been used more? It looks like the tonnage didn't increase as much as—

**Parker:** It hasn't increased as much as it should have. And one of the reasons is, we haven't done what we needed to do, as far as making it increase. It's not something, you just build it and it's going to occur. You have to work at this stuff to

make it happen. And then, a lot of the stuff is being done now, because we're getting more automobile plants in Alabama and Mississippi; and a lot of the stuff that is being utilized for those plants is coming up, and they'll dock, turn around, and take stuff, take it over to the plant, and they do it in this "real-time" inventory stuff. So, they're putting cars together over in Alabama. They'll come up on the Tenn-Tom, to get the stuff over there.

**EIR:** So, if there were more manufacturing for example, you might have—

**Parker:** That's the whole purpose of it. I mean, you don't build because you want to go out there and look at it. You build it so the thing can be used.

But it's not done overnight.

**EIR:** Exactly. What about Sacramento?

**Parker:** They need to do the funding for Sacramento. Look: There are problems all over this country! We can talk about different areas—there are problems everywhere.

**EIR:** Because they have to have a levee system that works.

**Parker:** They've got to have a lot of things that work, out there. But you've got to look at it from a holistic standpoint. You've got to address *every* problem. You've got to do it in conjunction, *none of this* is separate. None of it stays separate.

I argued that the '27 flood, in 1927, is what helped deepen the Depression. Everybody wants to talk about Wall Street. I think Wall Street occurred, partially because of the '27 flood.

But all of this, this is national in scope. It is not—I can take you to any area, and show you a specific problem. That's not how we need to look at it. This is a national problem, it has national implications, and when we have a catastrophe occur, like in New Orleans, it *really* becomes national at that point. And, people that are in the Midwest, who think they're removed from this situation in New Orleans, they haven't seen what's going to happen to soybean prices, and corn, and everything else: Because, the largest granary elevator in the world, is in New Orleans. . . .

**EIR:** So, do you think it's possible to direct the Congress and the White House to start to think on these terms?

**Parker:** It will continue to change. It is my *hope* that Congress will start paying attention to infrastructure, the way it should.

**EIR:** And the Bush Administration? Bush-Cheney?

**Parker:** I've always thought they should.

**EIR:** Are you disappointed that they haven't?

**Parker:** I'm disappointed that every Administration since the '60s, has not paid attention to what's going on.

See, I don't consider it difficult—I don't understand why



EIRNS/James Duree, Jr.

*"If you go to L.A. and you look at the port system and Alameda corridor, and the road system, and how it all ties in: How do you get goods to the port and from the port? This system that goes up is all interconnected!" So you can't say one aspect of the system is not paying its way, added Parker. The railroad along the Alameda Corridor is shown here.*

people have a hard time understanding it. I think it's just asinine that people wouldn't, just basically understand it. But, that may come from my life-experience. I just can not understand why they don't understand that this is one of our primary responsibilities.

**EIR:** Did you ever read Alexander Hamilton?

**Parker:** I've read some things about Alexander Hamilton.

**EIR:** His *Report on Manufactures* is terrific. He wrote this in 1791, and it's sort of like a survey of manufactures, but he uses the term "internal improvements," which is the term they used for infrastructure then. And his argument was—and this is something LaRouche is saying—you make this infrastructure investment, this will increase the level of industry and commerce, so that it increases your tax base. But, if you look at the increased economic activity, that activity will bring revenues that *more* than pays for—

**Parker:** They're all interconnected. All of this is interconnected: If you go to L.A. and you look at the port system and Alameda corridor, and the road system, and how it all ties in: How do you get goods to the port and from the port? This system that goes up is all interconnected!

Railroads: The port can't exist without the railroad! Trucking can't exist without the port! The railroads can't exist without the port—I mean, they're all interconnected. You can't say, "Well, this is not paying its way." The fact of the matter is, if it's not there, the others pay its way. There's a difference here. . . .

One of the things that I pushed for, was waterproofing all the pumps, and even if I'd have started on it the day I went

in, or the day the President got elected, you wouldn't have them "dunk."

**EIR:** What do you do when you waterproof them?

**Parker:** You build it so that the water can't get into the pumping system itself. You have a separate power supply, with generators, with a separate fuel supply so that you can run the dad-gum things. So, even though water's rising up around it, it's still pumping water out.

**EIR:** How much would it have cost to have done that?

**Parker:** Millions and millions and millions of dollars.

**EIR:** Did you try to push for it?

**Parker:** That was part of the whole thing. I mean, they've been trying to do that for years—long before me! . . . This is part of the total package. I don't know—"you can't do this." So, then you've got pumps under water, with no power, and you can't run them. They're not doing anybody any good. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to—

**EIR:** So, in a certain sense, it's an indictment of the country for the last 40 years, of not having forethought.

**Parker:** I blame everybody: I blame government officials. I blame Democrats and Republicans. I blame the people of this country for allowing it to happen and for electing people that are so shortsighted. I blame myself for not being better at trying to convince people. I blame the environmentalists, for putting limitations in place, knowing full well that we can protect the environment *and* have an infrastructure that works.

*Everybody is at fault in this thing. Everybody.*