

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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Opening Statement
Rep. Gerald F. Connolly, Ranking Member
Hearing on “Reviewing the Tennessee Valley Authority’s Prohibition on
Houseboats”
September 23, 2016 9:00AM–Rayburn 2154

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing to examine the Tennessee Valley Authority’s recent policy requiring the removal of all nonnavigable houseboats and floating houses from reservoirs by 2046—30 years from now.

Most are familiar with the TVA—a self-funded agency which supplies 9 million Americans and businesses with low-cost electricity across seven southeastern states. The agency has a long history of supporting the economic development and prosperity of residents and businesses in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—attracting \$7.8 billion dollars of direct investment last year alone.

Today’s hearing on floating houses, however, highlights a lesser known responsibility of the TVA. In 1933, when Congress created the agency, it provided TVA with broad jurisdiction to regulate obstructions that affect navigation, flood control, or public lands across, along, or in the Tennessee River or any of its tributaries.

Privately-owned nonnavigable houseboats and floating houses have been located on agency reservoirs since at least the 1950s. Yet despite a ban on new construction since the 1970s, these structures have proliferated—numbering over 1,800, with only half of them holding a permit, says the TVA.

Many have asked why TVA has not enforced its own prohibition for nearly 40 years—but Mr. Chairman, I am encouraged that since his appointment in 2012,

Mr. Johnson, TVA's CEO, has acknowledged that problem, and has acted to correct that record.

I find it noteworthy that both supporters and detractors of the new policy all agree that it would be irresponsible for TVA to do nothing.

This new rule would impose an eventual ban on existing nonnavigable houseboats and floating homes in 30 years. It would also require new environmental and safety standards until that time.

One Marina said in public comments that issues with electrical shock have been common around houseboats and called for that these structure to be held to the same regulations as other vessels.

Another commenter claimed, quote, "I have 2 friends who own a boat on Norris Lake and their children continue to get ear infections, which according to their family doctor are caused by them swimming close to the dock at the lake and getting sewage contamination in their ears."

That is alarming.

While Mrs. Sneed does not support the rule, she has acknowledged, quote, "we definitely need regulation."

Mr. Wilks has also stated, quote, "there should be some regulation as to the upkeep of the houses, both structurally, mechanically and ecologically."

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission also voiced safety concerns for boaters, skiers, and swimmers.

I think all of our witnesses agree that without action, a continuation of the status quo would be irresponsible.

All of these comments were gathered by TVA either in person at a number of public meetings throughout the Tennessee Valley, or submitted in writing. TVA's Environmental Impact Analysis goes into considerable detail to respond to many of the comments that were submitted—point by point.

I'm encouraged by the TVA's openness and consideration of all stakeholders' concerns, and I understand the agency compared a number of alternatives.

Again, I thank the Chairman for having this hearing and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

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