

Thank you for contacting me regarding Optima Lake. I appreciate your willingness to hold me accountable for my statements and votes. My mail volume has increased dramatically in recent months and I personally read every original letter or E-mail message I receive. It was not my intention to keep you waiting, though, I deeply apologize for my delayed response.

I certainly respect your convictions and love for the Optima Lake Wildlife refuge and appreciate this opportunity to share with you my thinking on the issue.

First, let me address why I became involved in this issue. Last spring, I was performing an exhaustive review of all projects that were set to receive funds from the stimulus, in preparation for a financial management oversight report (see my website for the final report)<sup>[1]</sup>. I believe it is important for members of Congress to know where these funds are allocated, and if the funds are being spent appropriately and efficiently. It was with some surprise and concern that I discovered that over a million dollars were allocated for new cable suspension guardrails at Lake Optima to bring the lightly used road up to full federal highway standards.

As you know, Optima Lake was built to improve the water supply of the Panhandle and to provide protection. The lake never fully materialized, and internal Corps analysis now reveals that it never will. My frustration lies squarely with its mismanagement by the Corps. Congress has appropriated tens of millions of dollars for the Optima Lake project for over forty years. If you have visited the facilities at Optima, it is apparent many of those dollars were not making it to Texas County. In reality, the Corps abandoned the project years ago. I was greatly disturbed to learn that it was suddenly preparing to spend \$1.2 million in stimulus on the guardrails.

Active Corps projects, including Fort Supply, are crumbling and facing major maintenance needs. Clearly, the agency must do a better job of prioritizing its scarce federal dollars. The decision to spend the money on top of the line cable tension guardrails was a strong indication that the Corps is unable to accomplish this vital goal. The Corps has further raised concerns about its ability to act as a good steward of your tax dollars with its recent plans to spend more than \$200,000 to demolish recreation facilities at Lake Optima. This is an absurd decision, and it should be scrapped.

With respect to the federal government's future relationship with Optima Lake, I believe the following three principles should guide Congress as it reviews this issue.

First, the time has come for the federal government to end its involvement with Optima. It has sorely mismanaged the resource, and before the stimulus debate, was allowed to largely go unnoticed. My overriding objective is to get federal bureaucracies out of this situation. Taxpayers in Texas County, and across the nation, deserve better.

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Second, we must not lose sight of the fact the federal government forcibly took this land with a very specific purpose in mind. Since that never materialized, former property owners should have the ability to purchase some lands back at fair market value. I have not discussed this with any former owners, and do not know how many, if any, are capable or interested in re-purchased. However, property rights are constitutionally recognized and form the foundation of economic liberty. We cannot take that lightly.

Third, as you may know, the Army Corps of Engineers has leased approximately 4,000 acres to the State of Oklahoma for decades for the purposes of a wildlife preserve on the grounds of Optima Lake. If the State of Oklahoma wants to purchase some of the lands to maintain its active and substantial presence there, I believe they should be given the right. I am sensitive to the fact that many Oklahomans, like you, appreciate and actively use the wildlife preserve leased by the State.

Lastly, I would like address concerns raised by some about my commitment to preserving access to public lands and the rights of hunters and outdoorsmen. Many Oklahomans, like me, are avid hunters and supporters of the Second Amendment Gun Rights. I recognize that many Oklahomans use the Optima Lake wildlife grounds for hunting and recreation. I want to make clear that I share and count myself amongst those patriotic Americans who enjoy gun ownership, hunting, and outdoor recreation. My views on the federal involvement of Optima Lake have nothing to do with my record for standing with gun owners and hunters. Allow me to highlight my record on these important issues.

With respect to Gun rights, I am proud of my record and believe it stands on its own. For illustration, following multiple attempts over the past year, I was able to force consideration and passage of an amendment (# 1087 to H.R. 627) that repeals the current federal gun ban in national parks and refuges. I have also co-sponsored the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which shields gun manufacturers from frivolous lawsuits, and I voted to repeal the Clinton assault weapons gun ban. I voted for an amendment to repeal the District of Columbia's Unconstitutional gun laws. I am also currently a co-sponsor of the Veterans Second Amendment Protection Act (S. 669), which protects veterans from having their Second Amendment rights unfairly removed. For more information on my efforts to protect the Second Amendment rights of all law-abiding citizens, please see my website, <a href="http://www.oburn.senate.gov/">coburn.senate.gov</a>.

With respect to public lands, similarly, I have aggressively fought to ensure continued public access on federal lands. For example, I was the lone senator opposing the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (H.R. 146), a bill that takes three million acres of prime public land and places it under new restrictions that will significantly limit public access. I am also leading the fight to stop restrictive land use regulations within the Ouachita National Forest in McCurtain and LeFlore Counties.

Congress is nowhere near any resolution for Lake Optima, but is my hope that conversation about the future of Optima Lake can be guided by what is in the best, long term interests of residents of Texas County and of taxpayers all across the nation. I hope to have the opportunity to visit with you more personally on my next visit to Texas County.

Thank you again for contacting me on this topic. If you have any additional concerns, please feel free to write again.