

Heather Fargo:

Good morning to everyone and welcome to Sacramento. How many of you are not from Sacramento? Very impressive. Thank you so much for joining us today. This is such an incredibly important subject to us here in our city, in our community, and in our region. There are approximately 400 or 500 of you that have come from as far away as Holland to discuss the important issue of vegetation as it relates to flood protection. Many of us were very stunned the day we read our local paper, which said that the Corps had a new policy to remove all vegetation on the levees in our region. We were stunned for two reasons -- actually, for one main reason, and that is that we didn't want to see it happen. We do admit to having a love-hate relationship with our rivers here in Sacramento; we love them in the summer and we begin to fear them and sometimes hate them in the winter, and I think that's true for a lot of communities, although some communities tend to flood in the summer, as opposed to those of here who tend to look towards flooding more in the winter when it's colder and, frankly, more difficult to survive.

We take flood control very, very seriously in Sacramento. I have been on the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency since it was formed; I first got appointed in December of 1989, and I've been doing it ever since. And even after becoming mayor, I kept myself on SAFCA because I believe that flood protection is the most important public safety issue facing Sacramento, and it's incredibly complicated and can be very divisive at times. So, we have a community that has gone beyond what I call denial; we just had a recent assessment district vote here in the community of Sacramento, beyond the city as well, and we received an 82 percent vote to assess ourselves again for flood protection. That's how seriously we take it here.

Well, we also take our parkways seriously. We take the option of being close to nature here seriously. There's a lot of recreation that takes place along our parkways; we think that our parkways here in Sacramento along the American, along the Sacramento, are two of the most beautiful

urban parkways anyplace in the nation, and we don't want to lose them. That's part of why people came here, and as some of the previous speakers mentioned, that vegetation is historic; that vegetation was frankly placed here by Mother Nature, in some cases, and we don't like to argue with Mother Nature here. We tend to think that she knows a lot about what is right, and as we look forward to making improvements in our natural system and in our urban system, we feel a need to meld those here in Sacramento, to blend those.

And so I am incredibly grateful to all the sponsors and those of you that envisioned this symposium that you would hold it here in Sacramento, because we take this issue of what to do about vegetation as a very serious issue. We take as both a threat as well as an opportunity. We recognize that if we're going to be the largest metropolitan area at risk of flooding in the United States that we need to do all that we can to protect people. But we don't want to lose our quality of life while we do that, and we don't think we have and we hope that through your proceedings over the next couple of days that you will come forward with some resolutions, some opportunities, some suggestions that hopefully will recognize the uniqueness of different parts of the United States.

National policy is important, but you can't always apply it evenly throughout a system as diverse as the United States, and we've found that in California and even in Sacramento, that you can't apply policy broadly into local situations. Rivers are important in our nation; they're certainly important in our region, and so is vegetation. We are, after all, known as the City of Trees, which hopefully you will get a chance to explore our city while you're here, enjoy the tree canopy, visit some of our great night spots, some of them not too far away, within easy walking distance. We have a number of great restaurants; we like people to come here and enjoy themselves, so I expect to see a lot of conversations over beer and wine this evening where you will really find the solution to what you are looking for.

I really encourage you to do that. I, on the other hand, will be at the City Council meeting tonight, so if you are feeling a little bit missing that kind of direct government activity, we're just going to be down the street at I Street; you're more than welcome to come. But we're not talking about flood control tonight, we'll be doing that today and tomorrow.

There are over two million people within the Sacramento region, and fully 25 percent of those people rely upon levees, and that is a significant number of people. We have 400 to 500 thousand people that rely upon levees every day, so we understand how important it is. But we also want to be able to walk under a tree canopy, we want to be able to maintain habitat; SAFCA has put a lot of energy into working on the lower American River through a forum that we've put together that has allowed us to improve fisheries and improve habitat. And that's what our community is looking for, is a balance, and that's difficult; I realize it's a stretch to really try to figure out the nuances and the balances that have to take place to preserve a natural habitat and to offer shade and vegetation, and at the same time make sure that our levees are strong. We don't want to lose more and more people.

So, in conclusion I want to thank U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, I want to thank the State Reclamation Board, the California Department of Water Resources, and in particular, the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency staff. Now, that I know they have 13 staff members to equal the 13 board members, that's a very interesting number. But that's good. We have a very creative staff, we have a very dedicated board, and we have a community which is paying attention to what you are doing. I think there are other communities that probably are as well, but this particular community is very interested in the outcome of this symposium. I see a lot of very alert and creative people in the audience and I really hope you do your best so that we can continue to maintain our quality of life while at the same time making strides in providing additional flood protection.

Thank each and every one of you for being here, and best of luck to you.