

Congress Overrides Bush Veto of Water Resources Development Act

WASHINGTON, DC, November 8, 2007 (ENS) - Congress handed President George W. Bush the first veto defeat of his presidency today as the Senate approved the \$23 billion Water Resources Development Act, WRDA, by a wide majority. The House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to override the president's veto on Tuesday.

With the Senate vote, the measure to authorize more than 900 water supply, flood control, navigation, and environmental restoration projects became law.

President Bush did not immediately comment on the Congressional action. Announcing his veto Friday, the president said the measure was "not fiscally responsible."

"American taxpayers should not be asked to support a pork-barrel system of Federal authorization and funding where a project's merit is an afterthought," Bush said.

The 79 senators voting to override Bush's veto, included 34 Republicans who broke ranks with their party's leader. Republican Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma led the revolt.

"I am proud to have led the effort in the Senate to ensure enactment of this critically important national infrastructure bill," said Senator Inhofe, a fiscal conservative who is ranking member and former chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee.



"Enactment of WRDA is a victory for addressing America's water resources needs in a fiscally responsible manner," Inhofe said today. "The WRDA bill is not a spending bill; it is an authorizing bill. It simply sets out which projects and programs are allowed to get in line for future funding and sets the maximum amount of money that can be funded."

"The authorization committees, such as the Environment and Public Works Committee, should provide the first Congressional review, and that is what we have done with this WRDA bill," Inhofe said. "I remain committed to ensuring that spending for the projects authorized in this bill do not exceed the amount we authorized today and vow to lead the opposition to any such

attempt."



New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. September 9, 2005 (Photo by Jocelyn Augustino courtesy FEMA)

Senator Barbara Boxer of California, who chairs the Environment and Public Works Committee said after the vote, "It is very unusual for a Congress to override a Presidential veto. This is only the 107th time it has been done in the history of the country. The first one was in the 1840s. President [John] Tyler tried to buy some military equipment without getting the approval of Congress."

"Mr. President," Boxer asked of the current president, "why should we have to fight over everything? We shouldn't have to argue over making sure that our infrastructure is strong."

Boxer said she supports WRDA in part because it authorizes billions of dollars in infrastructure and coastal restoration projects that address the needs of New Orleans and coastal Louisiana after the disastrous 2005 hurricane season.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated southern Louisiana, claiming 1,464 lives, destroying more than 200,000 homes and 18,000 businesses and flooding nearly 80 percent of New Orleans.



Senator Barbara Boxer (Photo courtesy EPW)

"This bill really fulfills a promise the President made in that very dark and gloomy night when he went out with the eerie lights behind him because he was right at ground zero of Katrina," Boxer said. "He said he would keep his commitment to the people of Louisiana, that he would protect them. And still, he vetoed this bill."

Boxer thanked Senator Inhofe and his staff for their cooperation. "This has been quite an experience. At most of you know, Senator Inhofe and I don't exactly see eye to eye on everything but on this we were very much a team."

"I say to communities all over the country, including my own, we know you have flood control needs. We know that you need to keep up with imports and exports and make sure our ports function right," Boxer said. "To those who want to preserve the environment, have restoration of the environment, we do that here."

The last WRDA legislation was enacted in 2000, when it was signed into law by President Bill Clinton.

"We stood together - Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate - to fight for our local communities that need long-overdue federal assistance," said Congressman James Oberstar, a Minnesota Democrat who chairs the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

"Congress did what President Bush refused to do - invest in America's water infrastructure," he said.



Congressman James Oberstar (Photo courtesy Office of the Congressman)

"Today, Congress kept the commitment that President Bush made to the Gulf Coast region, when he promised to help with hurricane recovery," said Oberstar. "Congress kept our commitment to the State of Florida, which will get much-needed resources for Everglades protection. And Congress kept our commitment to the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System, which needs funding for a system of new locks and dams and environmental restoration."

Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas, who chairs the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, praised WRDA provisions to "reinvigorate" broader watershed planning authority, including a federally funded assessment of water resources needs for the river basins and watersheds of the southeastern United States, and a region wide study to review drought conditions in the southwestern United States.

"These region-wide assessments are especially critical to the southeastern U.S., including the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, which are experiencing the ever-increasing challenge of balancing water needs during a record drought," she said.

The Florida administration of Republican Governor Charlie Crist today applauded the veto override.

WRDA authorizes a number of projects critical to Florida that have been awaiting federal authorization and funding, including important components for Everglades restoration and the South Florida ecosystem.

The passage authorizes new projects under the 30 year, \$10.9 billion Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, CERP, approved in the Water Resources Development Act of 2000. It includes language that will allow funding of previously authorized projects at today's costs.

"We are grateful to Congress for recognizing the unique environmental needs of this nationally protected ecosystem of 18,000 square miles," said Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Michael Sole.

To date, Florida has invested close to \$2 billion in CERP, the 50/50 state and federal partnership to restore and protect



Great egret and cypresses in Florida's Everglades (Photo courtesy [National Park Service](#))

the Everglades.

"We will work with the Florida Legislature, all members of Congress, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the environmental community to continue our collective commitment to restoration of America's Everglades and achieve stellar environmental and economic benefits," said Sole.

Restoring America's Everglades is reviving habitat for more than 60 threatened and endangered species, establishing a reliable supply of water for millions of Floridians and providing flood control consistent with the restoration, he said.

Louisiana Recovery Authority Board Member Chet Morrison said his state is grateful to Congress as the veto override will assist with hurricane recovery efforts.

"WRDA authorizes billions for projects to restore Louisiana's hurricane and flood protection infrastructure in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and the 110th Congress will always be remembered for taking swift action today and delivering on their commitment to Louisiana and the Gulf Coast's recovery," said Morrison.

The 33 member Louisiana Recovery Authority is the planning and coordinating body that was created in the aftermath of these storms by Governor Kathleen Blanco to lead one of the most extensive rebuilding efforts in the world.

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