

**House Report 108-542 - DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND
RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATION BILL, 2005**

MINORITY VIEWS OF DAVID OBEY AND NORMAN DICKS

This Interior appropriations bill demonstrates the fact that the Majority party Budget Resolution passed by the House is at war with the Administration's fiscal pretensions in a fundamental way. Notwithstanding the damage which is caused by this reality, the Minority appreciates the cooperative manner in which the fiscal year 2005 Interior Appropriations bill has been handled. We have been consulted throughout the process and many of our priorities are reflected in the bill. In particular, we are strongly supportive of the decision to include \$500 million of emergency fire funding for both the 2004 and 2005 budget seasons. In addition, we appreciate the Chairman's assurance that additional funds will be sought to make sure our parks, refuges and forests are adequately staffed. We also appreciate that many of the irresponsible cuts proposed by the President in high-priority areas such as Indian schools and health facilities were rejected. This substantive approach to the Committee's work is laudable.

The Minority, however, remains concerned that the Interior bill is inadequate in a number of areas. This is largely because the allocation provided to the Subcommittee is simply insufficient to address the Subcommittee's many responsibilities. Quite simply:

Bad Budget Resolutions result in bad 302(a) allocations of discretionary funding to the Committee;
Bad 302(a) allocations lead to bad 302(b) allocations to the Subcommittees;
Bad 302(b) allocations to the Subcommittees lead to disappointing bills.

The House Majority passed a Budget Resolution that gave priority to tax cuts for wealthy Americans over making critical investments that benefit American families. Now the Appropriations Committee is faced with the reality of providing the services that our citizens expect without adequate resources. The Interior bill is a poster child for this reality. The bill is \$257 million below last year and \$220 million below the President's request. This means inadequate services in our national parks, refuges and forests; inadequate funding to protect open spaces and wildlife for future generations; inadequate investments in energy research; and inadequate support for this country's arts and humanities.

Beyond the funding shortfalls, we do not agree with the Majority in several policy areas of the bill. In particular, we fundamentally disagree with the

ideologically-driven opposition to land acquisition. This bill rejects every one of the 75 land acquisition projects requested by the President. Unfortunately, our amendment to restore land acquisition funding to the level requested by the Administration was rejected during Full Committee consideration of the bill. Nor do we agree with the low priority that the Majority places on conservation related grant programs at the Department of the Interior. Supporting State and local efforts to preserve precious open spaces and wildlife are entirely appropriate and part of a healthy conservation partnership.

We are also disappointed that the House Majority has broken the bi-partisan promise on conservation. We are still adding up the damage, but it looks like funding for programs covered by the Conservation Trust Fund is \$850 million below the \$1.7 billion that was promised four years ago. That means:

- Less for preserving open spaces and critical historic lands from development,
- Less for support of wildlife programs,
- Less for preservation of wetlands,
- Less for historic preservation, and
- Less for assistance to state and local governments under the PILT program to replace lost revenue from lands already owned by the federal government.

The Republican Leadership of this Committee was forced to recognize that the President submitted a pretend budget that finances worthwhile increases with unrealistic cuts. A responsible Congress is not going to cut funding for Indian schools construction by \$66 million. The House is not going to cut funding for Indian hospitals and clinics construction by \$53 million, and we are not going to terminate \$240 million of on-going energy research programs. The Committee did the right thing in restoring these irresponsible cuts. To live within the Republican Budget Resolution, almost \$700 million of the Administration's 'let's pretend' initiatives had to be cut, including:

- \$50 million of increases championed by the First Lady for cultural programs at the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities and at the National Park Service.
- \$170 million more for land acquisition at our parks, wildlife refuges and forests.
- The Interior Secretary's proposed increases for state wildlife grants and for other conservation grant programs.
- The Forest Service Chief's proposal to expand the Forest Legacy program.
- The Energy Secretary's FutureGen proposal for a state of the art clean and efficient coal-powered electricity plant has great potential and should be funded at levels adequate to fully develop this concept.

As the bill moves forward in the legislative process in the House and later in the Senate and the Conference Committee, we intend to support efforts to address many of the shortcomings in the bill. In particular, we intend to support efforts to more adequately fund the arts and the humanities, to provide additional resources for the operational costs of our parks and refuges, and to provide additional funds for conservation of open spaces and wildlife.

David Obey.
Norman D. Dicks.

