

**House Report 109-080 - DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATION BILL,
2006**

ADDITIONAL VIEWS OF THE HONORABLE DAVID OBEY

As the Ranking Minority Member of the Appropriations Committee, I cannot fault the fairness of the process followed by our Committee in producing the fiscal year 2006 Interior Appropriations bill. Minority Members were consulted throughout the process and the bill reflects our input in a number of important areas. But a fair process by itself does not produce an acceptable product. This bill's principal responsibility is to provide for the environmental and conservation needs of America's people and its natural resources. Notwithstanding increases in a few critical areas, the FY 2006 Interior bill as currently presented simply does not fulfill that responsibility. Because of these failures, American families will be exposed unnecessarily to dirtier water and air and to the poisons of toxic Superfund sites. Because of its failures, many of America's pristine natural landscapes and historic structures, as well as the variety of its wildlife, may be lost to future generations.

The Interior bill's failings did not occur by accident. The overall lack of funds to address national needs is the direct and inevitable result of the vote cast last month to approve a Republican Budget Resolution for 2006 that provides \$11.7 billion less than the amount necessary just to maintain current service levels for domestic programs. As Majority Leader Tom Delay pointed out last month during debate on the Conference Report on the Budget Resolution,

This is the budget that the American people voted for when they returned a Republican House, a Republican Senate and a Republican White House last November.

After Republicans voted 218-12 in favor of a Budget Resolution with inadequate resources for domestic programs, I believe it is disingenuous for them to defend the Interior appropriations bill by saying, 'We did the best we could with an inadequate allocation.' The Republican Members had a choice and they voted for the discretionary spending total which they now say forces these destructive choices. Not one Democrat voted for the current Budget Resolution because we understood the damage to essential services which it would cause. The 2006 Interior bill now presented to the House epitomizes the draconian results of the Republican fiscal philosophy which espouses super-sized tax cuts for the most well-off over critical priorities like protecting the environment.

Among the many failings of the Interior bill reported by the Committee, the most destructive are its severe reductions in funding for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I am especially disturbed that the Interior Subcommittee, without a single hearing, has recommended cutting the Clean Water State Revolving Fund by \$242 million below the 2005 funding level. This program serves every state and almost every community in this country. But, without a word of testimony by the EPA or affected communities, the Committee has cut the Clean Water Fund by more than 20 percent this year and by almost 40 percent over the last two years. If the Interior bill is approved as currently drafted, the \$850 million provided in 2006 will be the lowest level of new capital assistance for this revolving fund since 1989. Majority Leader Delay was right.

This is the budget that the American people voted for when they returned a Republican House, a Republican Senate and a Republican White House last November.

The need for investment in this country's water systems is well documented and enormous. Two years ago EPA Administrator Whitman issued a formal report, entitled the 'Water Gap Analysis,' which estimated the twenty-year fiscal shortfall between what we are currently spending and what is required at \$388 billion. Everyone agrees that the Clean Water SRF program works. Over the last 16 years \$21 billion of appropriations for the Clean Water SRF have generated \$52 billion of construction projects in every state and in literally thousands of communities.

The impact of the cut to the SRF recommended in the current bill on local communities will be very visible. Projects that have already been approved by State water authorities for future funding will, inevitably, be rejected, scaled back, or substantially delayed. A table showing the impact of these cuts to each state is included at the end of these remarks. As Members review this table for its impact on their own states, they should remember Majority Leader Delay's prescient statement last month,

This is the budget that the American people voted for when they returned a Republican House, a Republican Senate and a Republican White House last November.

I am also very concerned by the decision reflected in this bill to reduce funding for environmental enforcement activities of the EPA by \$12 million. I wish that every private company, every public utility company and every community water and sewer authority would willingly comply with the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. I wish every industrial polluter who had dumped toxic PCB's and other chemicals into our rivers or buried them in dumps outside their factories would enthusiastically clean up their Superfund sites. Unfortunately, 35 years of experience has taught us that aggressive enforcement is needed if we are to get compliance with our environmental laws. Enforcement has resulted in settlements with coal burning power plants

that have cut emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides by nearly a million tons, reducing asthma attacks, lung disease and acid rain. Compliance agreements or enforcement orders with water and sewer authorities in cities across the United States have prevented billions of gallons of raw sewage from seeping into water supplies by requiring installation of upgrades at treatment plants. Members should not be surprised by these cutbacks in important environmental enforcement activities because Majority Delay was candid when he told us,

This is the budget that the American people voted for when they returned a Republican House, a Republican Senate and a Republican White House last November.

Not all the cuts in this bill are an artifact of it's allocation. Some reflect ideological positions of the Subcommittee Chairman with which I very much disagree. In my opinion, the Chairman's recommendation to eliminate \$190 million of Land and Water Conservation funding, including funding for all new federal land acquisitions as well as all assistance to States, is a mistake for the country and for the Congress. The American people recognize the need to preserve the remaining natural landscapes of this country for future generations. Those of us who visit our national parks and refuges know how precious they are. Five years ago 315 members of the House voted to make these programs an entitlement under the CARA bill because Congress didn't keep its word to adequately fund conservation programs. The Subcommittee Chairman certainly has a right to his sincerely held views regarding land conservation programs, but I do not believe that his recommendation to eliminate all funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, as reflected in this bill, represents the will of the House.

As I have noted throughout these remarks, these failings did not occur by accident, The Majority Leader of the House, Tom Delay, explained the reason for these cuts last month on the floor when the House adopted the Budget Resolution for 2006.

This is the budget that the American people voted for when they returned a Republican House, a Republican Senate and a Republican White House last November.

The FY 2006 Interior bill as reported to the House is not a bill that I believe Members of Congress can go home and tell people with a straight face, 'We did the right thing.'

I will not vote for it.

