

**House Report 107-564 - DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND
RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2003**

**MINORITY VIEWS OF THE HONORABLE NORMAN DICKS
AND DAVID OBEY**

In submitting these views, the Minority wishes to express its appreciation for the cooperative and bi-partisan manner in which the Interior Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2003 has been handled by the Chairman and the Majority. The Minority has been consulted throughout the process and believes that its views are reflected in many aspects of the bill. While we do not agree with every recommendation and continue to work for improvements in certain areas, in its entirety we believe that the Interior bill is one which Members from both parties can support.

In expressing our support for a fair bill which addresses the highest priorities within a constrained budget allocation, the Minority does not mean to leave the impression that we believe this bill fully addresses the natural resource and human needs which are addressed by agencies within the Interior Subcommittee's jurisdiction. In fact, the \$19,730 million allocation for 2003, while almost \$900 million above the president's request, is only 2.8 percent above the 2002 spending levels--an increase barely able to keep up with inflation. Nonetheless, the allocation has allowed the Committee to restore most of the cuts proposed in the Bush budget, especially those poorly justified reductions for energy research, forest fire prevention and preparedness, natural resource science at the U.S. Geological Survey and programs for urban parks.

There are also important increases. These include \$20 million for the weatherization program, which is funded at \$250 million. This program has been increased by \$98 million over the last two years and the increased funding will lead to significant savings in energy as additional homes, schools and hospitals are insulated. It is critical to lower income families who often live in poorly insulated houses and who have seen the cost of heating double in the last year. There are also important increases for the land management agencies, especially the Fish and Wildlife Service which celebrates its 100th anniversary and the Minority was particularly pleased to see the \$99 million increase over the request for Indian schools and Indian health programs. While far less than they need, it is a good recommendation given the allocation.

The Minority is pleased to join with the Majority in support of the sections of this bill which fully fund the new Conservation Trust Fund created two years ago by the Congress (title VIII of the Fiscal Year 2001 Interior Appropriations Act.). This new funding structure was created as our commitment to

significant increases for preservation of this country's natural and cultural resources. It expands programs which support critical land acquisition where lands are threatened by development, accelerates efforts to deal with maintenance needs of our parks, refuges and forests, enhances efforts to protect wildlife, and expands federal support for other conservation and preservation needs. By providing the full \$1,440 million authorized this year for conservation programs in the Interior bill, the Congress maintains its commitment to the \$12 billion in funding anticipated over the first six years of this initiative. This is roughly twice the amount which would likely have been provided under previous financing structures.

The Minority was especially pleased that the Committee adopted on a bi-partisan basis an amendment adding \$700 million in critically needed fiscal year 2002 supplemental funding to fight the catastrophic fires burning in many of the Western States. The 2002 fire season is shaping up to be one of the worst in recent memory. At the beginning of July more than 3 million acres have burned, almost triple the average for this time of year. We believe the failure of the executive branch to request adequate funding for this emergency is irresponsible and we are pleased that the Committee has responded by adding to the bill the supplemental funding which will clearly be needed.

While we have in these views attempted to indicate the many areas in which we are supportive of the bill, we must, however, express our consternation regarding the decision by the Committee to hold down funding for America's cultural agencies--the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). These agencies, which finance the country's small but critical efforts in support of cultural education and preservation, were cut by more than 40 percent in 1995 and, despite some progress in the last two years, for the most part have yet to recover. The NEA is funded in this bill at a level of \$116.5 million, \$46 million below the 1995 level and in real dollars a reduction of almost one-third. The funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities is similarly inadequate in this bill.

Last year, when the House considered the FY 2002 Interior bill, it approved a bi-partisan amendment to begin restoring federal support for these cultural agencies. The House at that time voted 221 to 193 in favor of adding \$10 million to the NEA and \$5 million to the NEH, the first increase to win final approval on a roll call vote since 1994. The Minority believes that this vote was a turning point in which the full House declared an end to the fight over federal funding for the arts and humanities begun in the early 1990's. It did so first because of the quality and the public support for these programs. But, it also did so because it accepted that the reforms instituted by the Congress had successfully dealt with the concerns of many in the public about federal support for controversial projects. These reforms include a significant broadening of grant support to more States and communities, an expanded and more publicly responsive advisory council, and controls to limit

funding for controversial programs. The Minority will continue to look for sources of additional funding for our cultural agencies as the bill moves to the House floor.

There are other areas beyond the cultural agencies where the Minority would support additional funds. In particular Indian health and education are high priority areas which need increased resources. But, as stated at the beginning of these views, we believe this legislation in balance is a good bill produced through an open and bi-partisan process. We believe it deserves an 'aye' vote at final passage.

Norm Dicks.
David Obey.

