International Union of Operating Engineers

AFFILIATED WITH THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR AND CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS

May 19, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Shuster
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Vitter
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nick Rahall
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Boxer, Chairman Shuster, Ranking Member Rahall, and Ranking Member Vitter:

The International Union of Operating Engineers appreciates your hard work to forge a bipartisan agreement in the conference committee on the Water Resources and Reform Development Act of 2014, H.R. 3080 (WRRDA). You have demonstrated that reaching agreement across the aisle on major national priorities is still possible. We sincerely appreciate your leadership.

The International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) represents nearly 400,000 men and women in the United States and Canada. Operating Engineers are one of the key occupations directly employed in the construction of the nation's locks and dams. We also dredge the nation's waterways. In fact, the Steam Shovel and Dredgemen's Union merged into the Operating Engineers in 1919. The point is that every day across the United States thousands of IUOE members are building the nation's locks and dams and dredging the nation's key navigation channels, making WRRDA legislation one of the union's top priorities.

The Water Resources and Reform Development Act takes a major step forward to modernize national policy on waterborne freight movements. By borrowing provisions from both versions of your respective chambers' legislation, you have cobbled together legislation that is more than the sum of its parts. For example, the House bill created a pilot program for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs); the Senate bill provides a new, innovative financing tool that may be appropriate for use by these PPP projects. We appreciate your focus on the big picture and on reaching compromise, melding together worthy policy ideas that will allow American goods to move more efficiently on the nation's waterways.

The unemployment rate in construction currently is still almost 150% of the national average, with almost 800,000 construction workers seeking employment. During America's fragile economic recovery, these infrastructure investments are absolutely necessary to deliver direct employment to Operating Engineers and other craftworkers, while simultaneously improving freight mobility and the health of the overall economy.
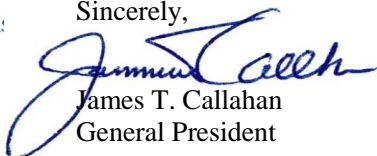
The IUOE supports a number of specific policy changes made to the program, in addition to the PPP program and innovative financing identified above. The reforms to the project-delivery process at the Army Corps of Engineers, the modifications to the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, and the policy changes made to emphasize dam safety and extreme weather events are all significant improvements to the way this country governs its water infrastructure. Other changes made in the legislation will deliver major environmental and economic benefits for future generations, helping to tackle the country's massive wastewater infrastructure deficit.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the passage H.R. 3080 in both chambers, and to see the President sign the legislation as soon as possible. Thank you again for your leadership.

Sincerely,

James T. Callahan
General President