

they had done this. How can we expect a small delivery service or some satellite dish installer or plumber to know that their business model is no longer viable?

No one will argue that people aren't entitled to a fair and equitable, appropriate wage, but if we are going to significantly alter national labor law, we should have a full and open debate and we should do it intentionally, not by accident and not by trial lawyers. I think that is the one glaring omission from this act. If we would fix that, we would have a number of employers from around this country who would be safe from more trial lawyer, frivolous lawsuits.

Shouldn't we ensure that companies are held liable? Sure, but we should do it as a Congress in a knowing way, a way that is befitting of this body, not by accident. We should not make them pay for our Congress' mistakes.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. I was hoping the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) would make it to the floor. We took this bill out of the order we anticipated it coming up in, and the gentleman from Arkansas would have been recognized.

Again, I thank Mr. OBERSTAR working with our side of the aisle; Mr. DUNCAN, my ranking member; the lead Republican on the Highway Subcommittee, Mr. DEFAZIO; and all of the staff on both sides. They worked real hard on this and over some weekends.

We had originally planned to tack this onto the WRDA bill, but that was not meant to be. Actually, that might work out quite well because this might become law before WRDA, given the comments I have gotten from the White House on the WRDA legislation.

But I thank all those involved in making certain that the laws that we pass have the intent and the content and the necessary corrections.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I listened thoughtfully to the comments of the gentleman from North Carolina. Those are issues that can be addressed in another time and another venue. We will most certainly address those matters in good order.

□ 2045

As I said at the outset, this is the seventh time the House has passed this technical corrections bill. We've been waiting patiently for the other body to join us in meaningful action on the bill, and so I know there's going to be a recorded vote. That's going to be reaffirmation of the strong stand the House has taken on these, and they truly are technical matters. We ought to just get them passed so that we can get over, so the States and the Federal Government agencies can get on with the work they need to undertake and that these adjustments to Members' projects can be made and be carried forward.

That's really what this is all about, and other matters that go beyond the scope of this current technical correction we will address in future legislation.

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I rise to clarify an ambiguity in a provision in the SAFETEA-LU Technical Corrections Act of 2007. Specifically, section 105(a)(99) of the bill refers to a project known as "Dowling Road Extension/Reconstruction West," which goes in a west-east direction from Minnesota Drive to Old Seward Highway in Anchorage, AK. Unfortunately, the provision could be read to mean that the project goes in a westerly direction from Minnesota Drive to Old Seward Highway, which would create a result that would be completely incompatible with the project since it would put the road in the middle of a lake and a bog. The word "west" as used in section 105(a)(99) is part of the name of the project, and is not intended to indicate the direction in which the project should be built.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time and ask for an "aye" vote on the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3248.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 1495, WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2007

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the rule, I call up the conference report on the bill (H.R. 1495) to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 597, the conference report is considered read.

(For conference report and statement, see proceedings of the House of July 31, 2007, at page H9058.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the conference report on H.R. 1495.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Minnesota?

There was no objection.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

At the very outset, I want to, on this historic day and historic occasion, express my great appreciation to the gentleman from Florida, the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. MICA, for the time that he has devoted and the close cooperation that we've enjoyed in crafting this legislation.

We reached an agreement at the very outset of this session that we would take up the work of the last 6, really 7 years on three previous Congresses on the Water Resources Development Act and limit action in this Congress to only those measures that were in the previous three Congresses and not take up new measures, not take up new initiatives by Members, not even adjusting the cost of previously approved projects on which cost escalation may have occurred, and limit the scope of the legislation to the work of three previous Congresses, and also to comply with the rules of the House in getting sign-offs from Members on both sides as the ethics rules require.

We crafted our sign-off sheet in advance of that done by any other committee in the House, got it approved by the Ethics Committee and by the Parliamentarian. We went through all these sign-off sheets, did everything according to the book, and in roughly 6 weeks from the beginning of the session, we were ready to go to the floor in March with the House version of the Water Resources Development Act.

Regrettably, it took quite some time thereafter for the other body, because of the difference in procedures and rules in their body from those in ours, for them to get to this point, but they eventually moved through committee and through the other body their version of WRDA.

We've concluded a conference, and I have to say, in 6 years, this is a very extraordinary, historic accomplishment, and I'm very grateful for the cooperation we've had and the participation every step of the way on the Republican side on this committee in the historic tradition of our committee, a very bipartisan approach.

I express great appreciation to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON), Chair of the Subcommittee on Water Resources. She devoted an enormous amount of her time in working through all of the 900-plus projects that come to the floor in this conference report, the 600-plus projects that were in the original House bill; and to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER), who equally devoted an enormous amount of his time to the subject matter before us.

It's that kind of time and effort and consideration that brought us to the point where we have a bill that I expect will pass with an overwhelming vote.

I will make a further observation, and that is, for me, as I said at the

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Currently, two independent studies are close to completion on the infrastructure needs of the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Seaway system, specifically the engineering, economic, and environmental implications of those needs as they pertain to the marine transportation infrastructure on which commercial navigation depends. Both of these studies have identified huge capital needs for restoration, operation, and maintenance of the seaway. According to the seaway, approximately \$135 million in unmet operations, maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation of the existing Eisenhower and Snell lock related facilities and related navigational infrastructure is necessary to ensure the continued, long-term viability of the system. Over the past 50 years, since completion of the seaway, there is about \$83 million in deferred maintenance costs that have left large portions of the infrastructure in poor condition and in immediate need of repair, replacement, or upgrading.

The conference report authorizes the Corps to assist the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation by carrying out projects to address the capital infrastructure and dredging maintenance needs of the seaway, either through appropriations of the Seaway Development Corporation or through the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. Funding for projects under this section should not come from the budget of the Corps.

PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES

The conference agreement includes important programmatic changes that address concerns with the existing Corps' study, design, review, and mitigation processes.

Independent peer review

The Independent Peer Review requirements provide that project studies shall be subject to peer review by an independent panel of experts. The conference agreement is a combination of independent peer review proposals passed by the United States Senate and the House of Representatives. The conference agreement improves upon both the House and Senate proposals to create a strong, workable, and independent process for review of project studies carried out by the Corps. For example, the conference agreement authorizes the independent peer review to run concurrent with the project study period, and requires that the peer review panel remain beyond the release of the independent peer review report to allow the expertise gained during the review period to be utilized by the Corps up to the release of the draft report of the Chief of Engineers, "Chief."

There are two categories for independent peer review—project studies for which independent peer review is mandatory, and project studies for which such review is discretionary. The criteria for mandatory review of project studies includes an estimated total project cost of more than \$45 million, project studies for which the Governor of an affected State requests an independent peer review, and project studies that the Chief determines are controversial.

The conference report also provides for discretionary independent peer review of project studies for which the head of a Federal or State agency charged with reviewing the project study determines that the proposed project is likely to have a significant adverse impact on environmental, cultural, or other natural resources under the jurisdiction of the

opening meeting of our committee on January 17, a very historic and nostalgic moment. I started in this body 44 years ago as clerk of the Subcommittee on Rivers and Harbors, and now I'm chairman of the full committee. That's not happened before in the House nor the other body, and I feel very privileged, very honored, very deeply moved to be here at this moment to see passage of this impressive legislation that will make significant changes in Corps policy and programs, review of Corps projects that will deal with the restoration of the wetlands in the gulf from Texas through Louisiana and Mississippi; restoration of the Everglades, one of the Nation's greatest water resource treasures; will deal with locks and dams on the Mississippi River to expedite passage of our agricultural commodities and international trade in which grain moves on as little as an eighth of a cent a bushel.

It now takes 820 hours round trip for a barge tow to move from Clinton, Iowa, to New Orleans, the world's most important grain export facility. We can take 60-plus hours of time off that transit and make our agriculture commodities more competitive in the international marketplace.

We can restore the efficiency of commerce on the Great Lakes by accelerating the dredging of the Great Lakes during this period of drought where we have harbor depths that are down 58 inches in Cleveland, 18 inches in St. Mary's Canal, 54 inches in Ashtabula Harbor, preventing the movement of iron ore to the steel mills, coal to the power plants at competitive prices. We're having to make two, three, four more voyages per vessel in the Great Lakes because the Corps has not been doing the dredging it needs to do. It will do that under the provisions of this legislation.

We address the issues of invasive species in the Great Lakes, and the east and the west coast and the gulf coast parts are now being invaded by species brought in from waters foreign to our lands. Mr. EHLERS, for whom I have a great admiration and respect, has been such a strong advocate.

There's much, much more in this legislation. We need not be exhaustive in discussing it. I just say I'm very grateful to all our colleagues on the committee for this very special moment, and especially to the committee staff on both sides who have worked so diligently. And in particular, I want to express my great admiration for Ryan Seiger, for he has steered the ship of state for us on this matter; John Anderson on the minority side who was has been diligent and forthright and helpful with his years of experience.

GREAT LAKES NAVIGATION

The conference report includes language to address the backlog of maintenance dredging needs in the Great Lakes and connecting channels, and ensure the long-term viability of the lakes for the movement of goods and services.

The Great Lakes region is home to 25 of the Nation's top 100 ports, when measured on

the basis of tons of cargo, as well as many smaller and rural ports. Unfortunately, over the past few years, declining water levels in the lakes and a lack of adequate maintenance dredging has hindered the overall efficiency of the Great Lakes system, and has made the movement of goods through the Great Lakes more difficult, with ports throughout the lakes being between 18 and 84 inches below their authorized depths.

These shallow depths have caused three out of every four vessels loaded in the Great Lakes over the last 5 years to have been forced to "light load" to safely travel through the reduced depths of the Great Lakes and navigation channels. "Light loading" forces shippers to take on less cargo, and reduces the overall efficiencies and cost-savings related to the movement of goods by ship—increasing the overall cost of goods.

Section 5014(a) provides authority for the Corps of Engineers, "Corps", using available appropriations, to address these emergency dredging needs. The Corps should immediately begin work on addressing this dredging backlog, and restore the authorized depths for the Great Lakes and connecting channels to sustain commercial navigation throughout the lakes.

SECOND LOCK AT SAULT STE. MARIE, MI

The conference report also ensures that the Corps will finally build the second lock at Sault Ste. Marie, MI. The Soo locks are situated on the St. Marys River at Sault Ste. Marie, MI. The St. Marys River, a water bridge connecting Lake Superior with Lake Huron, is a critical link in the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Seaway system.

Over 80 million tons of commercial commodities pass through the Soo lock annually. The primary commodity group is iron ore and taconite, comprising more than 50 percent of the total annual tonnage. The Corps estimates that the water route provided by the Soo locks reduces transportation costs by an average of more than \$4.90 per ton based on fourth quarter 1998 cost levels. Based on 1998 tonnage, this represents an annual transportation cost savings to the Nation of approximately \$420 million. Of the four U.S. locks, only the Poe lock is capable of handling vessels with beams in excess of 76 feet. Any disruption of service at the Poe lock would result in delays to the system's largest vessels and could cause serious disruption to the industries and companies that rely on the Poe-restricted vessels for shipment of raw materials, especially iron ore and coal.

In 1985, the Corps studied the construction of a replacement lock at the sites of the Davis and Sabin locks, and recommended a replacement lock at 1,200 feet by 110 feet. The project was authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, and reauthorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 1990.

The Water Resources Development Act of 2007 authorizes the construction of the second lock funded at Federal expense. The revised cost of the project, in accordance with the limited reevaluation report dated February 2004, is \$341,714,000. Section 3091 provides the Corps sufficient authority to carry out this project at the authorized dimensions. The Corps should budget for this project in the administration's fiscal year 2009 budget request, and immediately proceed to construction of this project, without regard to administrative policy.

agency after implementation of the proposed mitigation plans.

The conference agreement also includes a narrow provision for the Chief to exclude a very limited number of project studies from independent peer review. The expectation is that project studies that could be excluded from independent peer review are so limited in scope or impact, that they would not significantly benefit from an independent peer review. Project studies subject to independent peer review based on the request of the Governor of an affected State may not be excluded from review under any condition.

The conference agreement directs the Chief to contract with an external entity, such as the National Academy of Sciences or a similar independent scientific and technical advisory organization to establish the panel of independent experts. The bill ensures that independent experts with potential conflicts of interest in a project are excluded from serving on the peer review panel.

The conference report requires independent peer review to occur during the period beginning on the date of the signing of the feasibility cost-sharing agreement, and will be conducted concurrent with the development of the project study. Having the independent peer review carried out concurrently with the development of the project study will allow the independent peer review panel to receive relevant information from the Corps, on a timely basis, and allow the independent peer review panel to provide ongoing input into the development of the project study. The conference expects that this process will provide the independent peer review panel with sufficient information to conduct its review, as well as allow the peer review panel to recommend mid-course corrections to the ongoing project study, and avoid the potential for significant issues or delay to arise at the end of the project study period. As noted in the statement of managers, the managers recognize that the recommendations of the independent peer review panel are advisory; however, the managers expect the Corps to give full consideration to the findings of the independent peer review panel.

The independent peer review panel should conclude its peer review, and submit a report to the Chief, not more than 60 days after the close of the public comment period for the draft project study. The Chief may extend the period for the peer review panel to conclude its peer review if the Chief determines that additional time is necessary. The conference has included language to terminate the peer review panel on the date of the initiation of the State and agency review, which is conterminous with the release of the draft Report of the Chief of Engineers for the project, and which is after the issuance of the peer review report. Recognizing that the Corps intends to allow a member or members of the peer review panel to participate on the Civil Works Review Board, which requires District Commanders to present their final reports and recommendations for review, the bill requires the independent peer review to remain impaneled beyond the issuance of the peer review report and allows a member of the panel to participate on the Civil Works Review Board, and to be available as experts, if needed, for additional consultation on the project study.

The conference agreement applies the review process to project studies initiated in the

two years prior to enactment and for any study initiated in the seven years following enactment. The two-year look back applies to projects where the array of alternatives has not been identified. In including this language, it was our intent that "array of alternatives" be interpreted as when the alternatives are identified for public comment in a draft feasibility report. This should be quite late in the study process, resulting in the maximum number of ongoing studies being subject to the independent review process.

In the prospective application of the independent review process, all established independent review panels will not end after seven years. If a project study is initiated any time during the next seven years, the entire study process is subject to independent review, no matter how long it takes to complete the study.

Mitigation for fish and wildlife and wetlands losses

Typically, Corps' projects impact more wetlands than any other agency or entity in the country. Various organizations, including the U.S. Government Accountability Office, have raised concerns with the mitigation conducted by the Corps related to their projects. This legislation ensures that potential impacts from Corps' projects are provided timely and adequate mitigation. In addition to mitigating the impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, the conference agreement amendment to section 906(d) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 intends for the Corps to mitigate for any potential loss of flood damage reduction capabilities for activities impacted waters, including wetlands.

The conference agreement specifically amends section 906(d) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 to specify the elements that must be identified in a mitigation plan required under that section. Mitigation requirements now require mitigating losses to fish and wildlife, and mitigation must now include losses to flood damage reduction capabilities of the project area. The specific mitigation plan must provide a description of the physical action to be undertaken. The plan also must include a description of the lands or interests in lands to be acquired for mitigation, and the basis for a determination that such lands are available. The conference agreement requires the mitigation plan to identify the quantity and type of lands needed, and include a determination that lands of such quantity and type are available for acquisition. The plan also must include the type, amount, and characteristics of the habitat to be restored. The plan must include success criteria based on replacement of lost functions and values of the habitat, including hydrologic and vegetative characteristics. Finally, if monitoring is necessary to determine success of the mitigation, the plan must include a monitoring plan and to the extent practicable, identification of the entities responsible for monitoring. As monitoring is part of operation and maintenance of a project, in most cases the entity responsible for any monitoring will be the non-Federal sponsor. Such person must be identified no later than entering into partnership agreement entered into with the non-Federal interest.

The conference agreement supports more specificity in Corps reporting documents concerning expected mitigation efforts. This section also directs the Secretary to submit to Congress a report on the status of mitigation

concurrent with the submission of reports on the status of project construction, as part of the President's budget submission.

The conference agreement also directs the Secretary, when carrying out water resources projects, to first consider the use of a mitigation bank if the bank has sufficient and appropriate (including ecologically appropriate) credit to offset the impact, and the mitigation bank meets certain criteria. To the maximum extent practicable, the service area of the mitigation bank shall be in the same watershed as the project activity for which mitigation is required. The intent term "watershed" is to be the immediate, localized watershed in which the impact occurs and not the much larger watershed or watersheds that might be included in the service area of a mitigation bank. This is especially critical to address potential impacts in higher order streams, including headwater streams, where the mitigation activities should be proximate to the impacted areas.

Principles and guidelines

The conference agreement also directs the Secretary of the Army to undertake a review and revise the principles and guidelines used by the Corps for formulation, evaluation, and implementation of water resources projects.

The current principles and guidelines focuses predominantly on the national economic development ("NED") benefits of Corps projects, requiring a project to achieve a positive economic benefit cost ratio before projects are recommended. In many cases, however, the Corps has struggled with utilizing a traditional NED analysis in the evaluation of projects within environmental restoration mission of the Corps. The NED analysis works well on traditional Corps projects such as navigation and flood damage reduction, but is not always appropriate in the development of benefit cost analyses for environmental restoration products. The Corps demonstrated its awareness of this issue through the issuance of regulatory guidance materials that encourage, to the maximum extent practicable, the inclusion of the national ecosystem restoration ("NER") benefits for ecosystem restoration projects.

The conference agreement directs the Corps to revise its existing principles and guidelines to incorporate the unique needs for evaluating environmental restoration projects into its current master planning guidance. This is intended to enable the Corps to build better projects. As is evident in this legislation, many of the recent Reports of the Chief of Engineers recommend multipurpose projects that appropriately address multiple concerns in a single project. A revised principles and guidelines should enable the Corps to better weigh the values of the different components of a multipurpose project.

EARMARK DISCLOSURE

In the preparation of the table of Congressional earmarks that accompanies the Statement of Managers for the conference report, a limited number of earmark disclosures were inadvertently deleted from the table. The following Members of Congress have provided the Committee with earmark disclosure forms for the following projects:

Representative STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN (SD) for section 5158(253) Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation (Dewey and Zeibach Counties) and Perkins and Meade Counties, South Dakota.

Representative PATRICK MURPHY (PA-08) for section 5003(a)(12) Ingham Spring Dam, Solebury Township, Pennsylvania.

Representative SOLOMON ORTIZ (TX-27) for section 3150 Lower Rio Grande Basin, Texas.

Representative CHARLES W. DENT (PA-15) for section 5003(a)(14) Stillwater Dam, Monroe County, Pennsylvania.

Representative BARBARA LEE (CA-09) for section 3182(b) Oakland Inner Harbor Tidal Canal, California.

Representative FRANK PALLONE, Jr. (NJ-06) for section 1001(34) South River, Raritan River Basin, New Jersey.

Representative RUSH D. HOLT (NJ-12) for section 1001(34) South River, Raritan River Basin, New Jersey.

The following Member of Congress was inadvertently listed in the earmark disclosure report for the Statement on Managers for the conference report:

Representative ROBERT ANDREWS (NJ-01) for section 1001(34) South River, Raritan River Basin, New Jersey.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Well, first of all, I can't begin this debate on this water resources legislation without congratulating Mr. OBERSTAR. As you heard Mr. OBERSTAR say that some 44 years ago he was a staffer for Chairman Blatnik, I think his name was, at that time and tonight he chairs the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and I'm pleased to be the Republican ranking member to have worked with him to bring forth a bill that is very important, not only to Mr. OBERSTAR, and his efforts and others in trying to bring a bill forward.

You know, we have not passed a water resources infrastructure bill since the year 2000. Normally, we pass it every 2 years in a cycle legislation that sets forth the projects and the policy and the priorities for building the Nation's infrastructure, and we haven't done that.

Now, one of the problems that we've had is that we've had a bad name given to earmarks, and this bill contains some 950 projects, almost all of them earmarks. There are a very significant number of earmarks in this bill.

From the time I assumed responsibility for the T&I Committee on the Republican side and in my discussions with Mr. OBERSTAR, I said we've got to make certain this process is open, this process is transparent and that we restore faith in this process. The choice is that we could pass a bill tonight for \$20 billion and authorizing projects and not name those projects but let some bureaucrats down the street that are unelected make the decisions, but that's not the way this process works.

The people sent us here, they send us here to renew the contract every 2 years to decide what the priorities are for our districts, and that's what this legislation is about.

There are 950 projects in this legislation, again a very high number, and the bill is a very high number, probably \$20 billion when you total up all those projects in authorization. Now, all of them won't get funded, but we have a responsibility to set the priori-

ties, and the people are setting the priorities through their elected representative, not some appointed bureaucrat.

I tried to make this a transparent process from the beginning. These are all of the Republican Water Resource Development Act of 2007 requests. These have been on file. These have been open to the public. The press has been in. They have been carefully vetted. Mr. OBERSTAR and I attempted to vet every single project on the House side, and the staff and others have been working to make certain that we vetted the Senate and all the projects in this bill. And I think we've done about as good a job and opened the process up to sunshine, to again a fair and open honest process and hopefully restored some of the faith in this process.

Now, I did receive today a communication notifying me that the White House will probably veto this legislation. That's unfortunate, and I've talked to the White House. We've tried to keep the dollars number down, but I tell the White House and anyone else, and I will support Mr. OBERSTAR and others if we have to override that veto. We need to do that. Our job is to make certain that we build the infrastructure of this country and we do it in a responsible manner.

We haven't had a bill since 2000. All you have to do is do the math. The math is simple. The bills in the past have been about \$6 billion, 6X3 is 18, and you add a few billion dollars more for inflation, and this is the number we're at and the number of projects we're at. I've told this to the President's advisers, and I regret that we're in this situation, but we'll have to do what we have to do. The President's going to have to do what he has to do.

But let me tell you now, and Katrina should be a lesson to us all, you either pay now or you will pay later.

□ 2100

These are projects that will determine whether dams break, whether levees are secure, whether water resources for this Nation are available, whether we do important environmental restoration that's been left behind.

Again, I repeat that this is authorization, not funding. But we have a responsibility to pick and set those priorities as the people's elected representatives.

Let me tell you also again critical needs in this bill. I have had Members literally come to me with tears in their eyes and say that, in fact, a project is so important that people's homes, lives and properties may be destroyed if we don't move forward with authorizing their projects.

In my own State of Florida, I am pleased tonight, and there are ironies tonight, I remember working with Senator DOLE when we tried to do the Everglades restoration. That was talked about for years, even when I was in the legislature back in Florida in the 1970s.

Tonight, in this bill is the authorization for the first construction money

to restore Florida's Everglades, a national environmental treasure that, unfortunately, man and sometimes the Corps of Engineers in some unwise policies have nearly ruined. But we have a chance now to restore that through this legislation.

In 2000, we authorized study money. This is the actual work money, the first work money for that. In my own community, and I close on this, I have A1A, scenic and national highway designation A1A, through Flagler County, which is literally falling into the ocean. The beach has eroded. We have no more beach there. We need to restore that. Those are the kinds of projects that are in this bill, even for me as a ranking member.

I strongly support this measure. I think it's responsible. I don't want to get into a contest with the White House, but, again, I thank the staff; Mr. BAKER, I will yield to in a few minutes; Ms. JOHNSON; Mr. DUNCAN, the former chairman of the water resources; and all others who have worked on this.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute to express my appreciation to the gentleman from Florida for his splendid cooperation, his heartfelt earnestness on getting this legislation through and understanding the great significance it represents for all of us.

I want to emphasize once again, we exercise great discipline in this body in shaping the legislation, keeping the costs within containment, within the previous 6, almost 7 years of projects that had already been vetted through the House, passed by this body and yet, unfortunately, didn't make it through the Senate.

I read with heavy heart the administration statement of veto. I think that it's a misunderstanding on their part. We will do our part, we will do our role, and the other body will do its part. Then we will see whether, in fact, a veto comes forward. If it does, we will deal with it just straightforwardly, without rancor, without discussion. These are the right investments for America.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 7 minutes to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON), the distinguished Chair of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment and thank her once again for the splendid work.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the conference report for H.R. 1495, the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.

I congratulate Chairman OBERSTAR, Ranking Member MICA and the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, Mr. BAKER, for your work on reaching this agreement in the vital infrastructure investment bill for the Nation's water resources needs.

I especially express my appreciation to the staff, to Congressman YOUNG,

Congressman DUNCAN, and Congressman COSTELLO and other distinguished members of this committee, because we have all worked together in a bipartisan manner.

All of us assembled here this evening understand the magnitude of this moment. The clock is working against the infrastructure of our country. The 7 years we have waited to enact a water resources development bill have led to significant increases in cost to adequately address the Nation's deteriorating water resources and flood control infrastructure.

As such, I am delighted that we as conferees have come to an agreement on the issues independent of review, environmental issues, environmental infrastructure and individual projects that have, up until now, prevented us from crafting a final conference report.

We do right and good by this country when we invest in its infrastructure. I agree with the chairman that enactment of a water resources bill this year is critical to economic prosperity, job creation, protection of the environment and public safety.

Since Congress last passed a Water Resources Development Act, we have seen Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita devastate the gulf coast and my home State of Texas, flooding cities, damaging economies and businesses and threatening public health.

No water resources bill has been enacted since the year 2000, the entire term of this current administration. While I am fully aware of the veto threat that this administration has issued on the conference report, I want to remind my colleagues that since the start of the Iraq conflict in 2003, nearly \$42 billion has been appropriated at the request of the administration for Iraqi reconstruction, one-third of which, or \$14 billion, is going towards Iraqi economic infrastructure.

I would daresay that if this level of attention is adequate for Iraqi water and road infrastructure, my State, as well as my constituents, who are constantly beleaguered by outdated flood protection, are as equally deserving of the attention afforded by H.R. 1495. I deeply regret that the administration has decided to turn its back on a bill that would put Americans to work with good-paying jobs, protect lives and property and bolster our Nation's infrastructure.

A recent report by the Texas Section of Civil Engineers assessed my State's infrastructure and rendered a dismal cumulative grade of below average. The assessment of the State's flood control fared even worse, with the State receiving a failing grade of D minus.

Over the past decade, Texas has experienced 15 federally declared disasters, most involving flooding. Moreover, Texas leads the Nation in terms of dollars paid for flood claims, second only to the State of Louisiana.

The population of Texas is expected to double in the next 30 to 40 years. De-

velopment in and near flood plains can be expected to increase, as developers continue to build near the State's rivers, lakes and coastlines.

In my district, the Dallas Floodway accepts 1,600 square miles of Trinity River watershed runoff and safely moves the floodwaters through the City of Dallas by virtue of levees that form both sides of the 2,000-foot-wide Floodway. The Floodway levees protect the downtown vicinity from a potential flood damage loss to properties and infrastructure at a price of \$8 billion or more. This is a major economic area.

The 23 miles of levees for the Dallas Floodway were originally constructed by local interests in 1932 and reconstructed by the Corps in 1960. But, since 1960, the upstream watershed has experienced exploding population growth, and that was not expected, which has significantly increased runoff, overwhelmed our antiquated drainage pumps, and greatly reduced the flood protection afforded by the Dallas Floodway levees.

My district's flood control needs are great; and, like the other communities across this Nation, they are anxiously anticipating the resumption of a predictable, consistent, and 2-year water plan.

I am glad our work here today brings us one step closer to this reality. The product before us authorizes a number of studies and projects, particularly for the restoration of coastal Louisiana, the restoration of Florida Everglades and the restoration of the upper Mississippi River and the Illinois Waterway System.

Again, we do right by this country when we invest in its infrastructure. Communities across the country have been waiting 7 long years to begin their noteworthy flood control and water infrastructure projects. I am pleased that we have been able to put our heads together and once and for all advance this vitally important and long-overdue legislation for the American people.

I want to extend my thanks again to the bipartisan committee leadership of both Chambers and, most especially, the efforts of our dedicated staff persons who have spent countless hours in crafting the conference report.

I strongly urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this conference report to H.R. 1495. The time to act is now.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 30 seconds to introduce the gentleman from Louisiana.

Sometimes in this business you have the opportunity to decide who is going to work with you on different projects. I had that opportunity in January, and I chose RICHARD BAKER.

If you don't know RICHARD BAKER, let me tell you, the good Lord sent RICHARD BAKER to us at the right time, because there is probably nobody in the Congress that could have been a better steward or done a better job in handling the Water Resources Committee responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER), just an absolutely outstanding representative, who has done a good job on this great bill that is so important to Louisiana.

Mr. BAKER. Mr. Ranking Member, I am humbled by your comments. I thank you for that courtesy, and I am deeply appreciative.

I have enjoyed very much the opportunity not only to work with you in this capacity but to work with our chairman, who has deep roots and ties to New Orleans, and the gracious gentlelady from Texas, the chairman of our subcommittee.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a terrific team from which there has been a terrific product developed that all Members who have spoken this evening have made clear as to the scope of the projects, the need for the projects, the clarity of the process, which our ranking member insisted on and opening up to public scrutiny the projects which ultimately are contained in this report.

I wish to make just one observation as a representative of Louisiana and make clear that the Governor, the congressional delegation and, most importantly, the people of Louisiana recognize what this legislation means to us tonight. It is not merely the elimination of an inconvenience or the restoration of some public service that we would like to have. This bill goes to the point of restoring our culture and our ability to live as people along the coast of the great State of Louisiana. For that, all of us are deeply grateful to the Members who have made this possible and to this Congress.

There is one notable development I would like to memorialize in the discussion of the conference report tonight, and that is a problem which had been long-standing for many years with the representatives of the great State of Mississippi, particularly that of Senator LOTT, to whom I would like to express deep appreciation.

The gentleman has had for many years concerns about the salinity levels of the water off the gulf coast affecting the productivity of his own fisheries. Likewise, we in Louisiana had concerns about some of the proposed remedies which, in our view, would have had an adverse water quality effect on our own fisheries.

In the course of the debate with the conferees, I was assigned the duty to work with the Senator and come to some resolution thereon, which will enable both States to seek the benefit they are entitled to.

I am pleased that with the coastal area impact program, we have identified a source of funding, we have agreed to the terms of construction for the Violet Canal project, and I tonight want to say tonight, on behalf of the congressional delegation and for those who follow us here, that it is our intent to honor and abide by the terms and

agreement that Senator LOTT negotiated with us and in good faith ultimately seek closure of this most difficult project, which I understand has led to difficulty and the consideration of prior WRDA legislative efforts. It is important, I believe, for us to recognize the contributions made by that delegation and their willingness to assist us in Louisiana in coming to final agreement.

With that, I am just pleased to be a small part this process and to have enabled the ability to participate in a small way getting a vital piece of legislation virtually for every congressional district in this country.

□ 2115

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 2 minutes to the distinguished Chair of the Railroad Subcommittee, Ms. BROWN from Florida.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. I want to thank Chairman OBERSTAR and Chairwoman JOHNSON as well as Mr. MICA and Mr. BAKER for their hard work in completing this long-awaited bill. With the new leadership in the House and on the committee, this legislation will soon be on the way to the President's desk for his signature.

These water projects and these projects are extremely important to my home State of Florida and for the Nation as a whole and have been held hostage for far too long. Like all transportation projects, these included in this bill will put people back to work, improve our communities, and create economic activity. This legislation also ensures that workers are paid a fair rate for their hard work. It is these workers' taxes that pay for these projects, and they deserve fair wages that allow them to adequately provide for their families.

By delaying the passage of this much-needed legislation any further, we are doing a disservice to the people we represent. I encourage my colleagues to support this conference report so we can move forward with these critical projects this bill contains and so that we can begin to work on the next WRDA reauthorization so we don't have to wait another 6 years to fund these critical water infrastructure projects.

Again, I want to thank Chairman OBERSTAR, especially Chairwoman JOHNSON for making this conference a reality. I want to thank Mr. MICA and Mr. BAKER again. And I am just very excited that after 6 years we are going to have a bill. And, as Mr. OBERSTAR always says, that our committee, Transportation is the committee that actually put America to work. And so not only do we put them to work, but we are protecting the infrastructure.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 4 minutes to one of the very distinguished members of the Missouri delegation, Mr. HULSHOF.

(Mr. HULSHOF asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HULSHOF. I thank the gentleman for yielding. To the chairman of the full committee, I would say as difficult and partisan as this day has begun, I think we are going to end on a very bipartisan high note, and certainly thank the gentleman, the gentlelady from Texas, certainly Mr. MICA and the gentleman from Louisiana who just spoke. Congratulations to all in finally passing this WRDA bill.

I would like to spend just a moment to talk about the legislation, the modernization of the five locks on the Mississippi River and the two on the Illinois River; the gentleman from Minnesota mentioned that earlier as far as the modernization of locks and dams. And I want to do this in a little different way.

Last week, we considered and passed the farm bill. Perhaps I took a little bit of heat for actually supporting that bill. In part, I supported it because it provides an important safety net for our farmers. And, interestingly, the bill we are considering tonight will go a long way to ensuring that farmers don't need to rely upon subsidies to survive.

How is that, you ask? Well, the ability to transport crops to export markets via the Mississippi River provides our Midwestern farmers a better price for crops than if that river was not available. Witness Hurricane Katrina as an unfortunate real world example of that specific example. A recent study conducted on behalf of a river stakeholder calculated that, if we fail to increase the size of our locks and if we were to allow river congestion to increase, farmers would lose \$562 million a year. That income would need to be replaced by subsidy payments on the farms or the farms would fail. As such, the \$1 billion in taxpayer dollars that this bill includes to modernize our locks is a hedge against the multiple billions of dollars of future farm subsidies and allows our farmers to continue to farm for the markets and not for a government check.

This bill, as has been noticed, is long overdue. The modernization of our outdated locks is also long overdue. These locks are standing out of habit. They were built in the 1930s to accommodate steamboats. Since 1975, the Corps has spent \$900 million under fix-it-as-it-fails scenarios, hoping to push major problems a little way down the river. But despite the Corps' best efforts, and I would have to say an amazing job of maintenance on a shoestring budget, the River continues to lose about 10 percent of its capacity every year due to unplanned maintenance closures.

Now, as a last point, a gentle point, I would say to my friend from Oregon, who spoke earlier on the rule, he and I have discussed on several occasions the modernization of locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi, and I want to be kind to him as I say he is not as ardent of a supporter of those modernization efforts as I, and he spoke of the inde-

pendent review process. I concur with him, but I would remind the gentleman that the independent review that examined the locks and dams modernization woefully underestimated the demand variable for corn and ethanol.

This year alone in my district, tens of millions of additional bushels of corn will be harvested this fall and will need a viable navigable waterway. The study by the National Academy of Sciences did not adequately anticipate this increased demand. So while independent review, I agree, is important, it is not infallible. But I thank the diligent work of the committee to include this modernization. I urge every Member to support the conference report.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield the gentleman 2 additional minutes, and ask if the gentleman would yield?

Mr. HULSHOF. I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. OBERSTAR. I compliment the gentleman on his statement and his recognition of underscoring the importance of the Mississippi River-Illinois-Ohio River system as the water highway for our midcontinent grain producers.

If you look at a map of the north and south hemisphere, the furthest point of Brazil sticks out of the South Atlantic Ocean, and that is Recife. From that port are exported soybeans. That is 2,500 miles further out in the Atlantic than New Orleans. They market to the same destinations that we do for soybeans, we in the great Midwest, to east and west Africa, and to the Pacific rim. They have a 5-day or 6-day sail advantage.

If we don't do the modernization on the locks, we continue to lose market share in the world marketplace. As I said earlier, grain moves on as little as an eighth of a cent a bushel.

So we have to do this, and it is going to be done. It has waited far too long.

Mr. HULSHOF. I appreciate my friend from Minnesota.

I would tell the gentleman that I grew up in the shadows of the levees of the Mississippi River, and I am the son of a Missouri farm family. We are about 8 miles from the Mississippi River as the crow flies, and the ability to have that navigable waterway means the difference between being in the black or being in the red for our family farm. So that lesson has imprinted itself upon me. And I am pleased to support the gentleman in this conference report, and I thank the gentleman for the additional courtesies.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield to an outstanding member of the T&I Committee on the Republican side of the aisle, the gentleman from Beaumont, Texas (Mr. POE) for 3½ minutes.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I want to congratulate the chairman, Mr. OBERSTAR, and Ranking Member MICA for their work on getting this long-delayed bill to the House floor, and I certainly support it. Both

the ranking member and the chairman have said, as long as I have been on this committee, that this is the most cooperative committee even though it is the largest committee in Congress. And it is true. It is a bipartisan committee that gets things done. We disagree, but we do it in a civil manner.

I am also impressed with Mr. OBERSTAR's knowledge of transportation history. He knows more about transportation that has occurred in the United States probably than all of us put together.

I do want to thank the committee for including in this WRDA bill the expedited completion of the study for the Sabine-Neches Waterway Project. I have been frustrated for the lack of progress by the Army Corps of Engineers to finalize this completion study.

The study report was started by the Corps in the year 2000, with a completion date of 2004. It was supposed to cost \$6 million. And now it is 2007, and this project study is still not completed, and estimates on final cost of the project have now risen to \$13 million. I appreciate the chairman's support for this study to be completed as soon as possible.

The Sabine-Neches Waterway is the riverway that separates Texas from Louisiana and flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Sabine-Neches is vital to not only southeast Texas, but it is essential for the national security needs of our Nation. It is the home of America's largest commercial military port and the Port of Beaumont, and it is second largest in the world. It is crucial for shipping military cargo to our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and is America's largest importer of crude oil by tonnage. Approximately 20 to 30 percent of the Nation's jet fuel is produced by refineries on this waterway, including 80 percent of the jet fuel used by our military. This riverway supplies petrochemical and energy needs for southeast Texas and the rest of the Nation.

Section 508 requires the Army Corps of Engineers to expedite completion of this study whether or not to expand, widen, and deepen the riverway for the Sabine-Neches Waterway, and the joint statement further directs that this would be done as soon as possible. I hope this study is finished this year so that it will be included in next year's full WRDA bill and we can start moving dirt to widen, deepen, and make this riverway important not only for southeast Texas but for national security reasons as well. It is important for our economy, it is important for our recovering economy after Rita in southeast Texas, and I look forward to working on the next WRDA bill after this one is passed to have it completed.

Once again, I want to thank the ranking member and the chairman for their full support.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAHONEY). And I thank the gentleman from Texas for his kind remarks.

Mr. MAHONEY of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.

I want to begin by thanking Chairman OBERSTAR, Congresswoman JOHNSON, and my colleague, Ranking Member MICA and their staffs on behalf of Palm Beach, Martin, and St. Lucie County for all the efforts that they have done to ensure that one of our Nation's greatest treasures is preserved for future generations, the Everglades.

Seven years ago, Congress authorized the largest environmental restoration plan in the Nation's history, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. Despite its broad bipartisan support for the plan in 2000, Congress has not honored its commitment to the Everglades. As a result, this plan once envisioned as an equal partnership between State and Federal Government has become the sole responsibility of Florida, whose citizens have invested over \$2 billion. Today, Congress has an historic opportunity to renew its promise to be an equal partner in Everglades restoration by passing the WRDA conference report for the first time in 7 years.

The conference report would authorize funding for numerous projects that are a part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, most notably the Indian River Lagoon and Picayune Strand. The Indian River Lagoon project located in my district is not only critical to the success of the Everglades, but it is critical to the economic well-being to the Treasure Coast of Florida.

Mr. Speaker, I urge Congress to pass this long overdue legislation and renew Congress' commitment to restoring one of our Nation's greatest treasures, the Everglades. And, once passed, I urge my colleagues to join me in telling the President, after 7 years of neglect, it is time to do the people's business and sign this bill into law.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON), whose district I mentioned earlier on the transportation bill had a terrible tragedy this afternoon.

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, of course I rise in very strong support of the bill tonight, and it is a very tragic irony that it is over a body of water that a tragedy occurred in Minneapolis today.

I rise tonight with every Member of that Minneapolis delegation. We stand united in our heartfelt concerns over the news of the collapse of the 35W Bridge spanning the Mississippi River in my hometown of Minneapolis, which occurred early this evening. I spoke with Mayor Rybak regarding this tragic situation, and I pledge to work with him in every possible way to recover from this disaster.

As of now, we simply do not know the magnitude of the tragedy. Early reports are that eight cars and one truck are in the river. About 50 school children very narrowly avoided falling into

the river. I do not know the depth of the injured. As of now, we know there are three confirmed dead. We pray for the deceased, for those still in peril, and for the families who have not yet heard the news from their loved ones.

□ 2130

Our delegation stands united in marshaling the resources for our Minneapolis emergency forces in need of search and rescue efforts.

I want to express my profound thanks for the dedicated work of the responders who are on the scene risking their own lives to save others.

We are grateful for those who we know have survived this tragedy, including, miraculously, the school bus containing perhaps as many as 50 youngsters.

Again, I am very saddened by the depth of this tragedy, stand together with all eight members of the Minnesota delegation, and I intend to return home tomorrow morning to Minneapolis on the earliest possible flight to do everything I can to help the citizens of my city recover from this horrible tragedy.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. RAMSTAD).

Mr. RAMSTAD. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding, the dean of our delegation, Mr. OBERSTAR; and I strongly support this Water Resources Development Act and thank, again, Chairman OBERSTAR for yielding.

I rise with tremendous sadness and grief about an awful tragedy that took place this evening in Minnesota. Full details on the tragedy are still sketchy, but we know that, as of 6:10 p.m. Minnesota time, during the midst of evening rush hour, a bridge on Interstate Highway 35W in downtown Minneapolis, very close to the Metrodome, collapsed, causing at least 40 cars to fall into the Mississippi River.

As my colleague, KEITH ELLISON, mentioned, at least three people are confirmed dead. A number of others have been hospitalized at the nearby Hennepin County Medical Center, and now we get word at five other hospitals as well. Rescue operations are still under way at this late hour, as fires continue to burn and people remain unaccounted for.

The Minnesota Congressional Delegation, thanks to our dean, Mr. OBERSTAR, has already met and pledged our total support to obtain whatever Federal assistance is needed.

In addition, on behalf of Governor Pawlenty, with whom I've been in constant contact, I want to offer the gratitude of all Minnesotans to Speaker PELOSI, who has already pledged her full support for any Federal assistance our State needs to address this bridge disaster.

I also want to pay special thanks to the first responders who are on the scene at the moment and rescue operations and other services. Every single Fire Department in the seven county

metro area is there on the scene, as well as all the Police Departments, emergency medical personnel. And, again, we all thank those brave first responders.

Our thoughts and prayers, Mr. Speaker, finally, are with the families of all those affected by this horrible disaster. We will continue to monitor the situation very closely, of course; and we ask all Americans to pray for the victims, the survivors and their families.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentlewoman from Minnesota (Ms. MCCOLLUM).

Ms. MCCOLLUM of Minnesota. The words of my colleagues from Minnesota reflect how we all feel at this time; and those of you in the Chamber, I know, are sharing our grief on this very, very sad day.

We need to stand united to make sure that infrastructure all around this country is properly maintained and cared for. We don't know the cause of the accident as of yet, but I know that we will do a thorough investigation and do whatever we can to prevent tragedies like this from happening in the future.

And to my congressional colleague from the other twin city, Minneapolis, please know that the City of St. Paul stands in solidarity. This is a time for grief for both cities, and we'll do whatever we can to be supportive.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2½ minutes to the distinguished gentleman from California (Mr. MCNERNEY).

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the tragedy that occurred today in Minnesota and assure our colleagues from Minnesota and the families of Minnesota victims that we stand in solidarity with them.

Thank you, Chairman OBERSTAR and Ranking Member MICA for all your hard work to finalize what would be the first WRDA bill to become law since the year 2000. I would also like to thank the staff for their diligence in finalizing the details of this important legislation.

Simply put, enactment of this bill is long overdue, not just because we have billions of dollars of water infrastructure projects that desperately need to be completed but because this bill means more jobs throughout the country and each project we undertake provides a net benefit to the economy in terms of improved commerce, new jobs and a cleaner environment.

In particular, this bill is vitally important to my State, and the chairman and members of the California delegation know all too well that much of Northern California that I represent is held together by a fragile web of 100-year-old levees with varying degrees of stability. As a source of drinking water for 25 million Californians, the mix of natural and manmade channels in the San Joaquin Delta need constant oversight and perpetual maintenance to remain functional.

Of particular importance is a flood protection project near the city of Morgan Hill in my district that improves the Llagas Creek, a waterway that runs several miles through Morgan Hill south to Gilroy. I'm very pleased that we are correcting a jurisdictional issue in this legislation that stopped the Corps from completing work on Llagas Creek for years. Specifically, we are now directing the Corps to complete the Llagas Creek.

Mr. Speaker, as a conference member on this legislation, I want the RECORD to indicate that the Llagas Creek project is meant to be completed under the national directive language we included in the bill and under the cost-sharing ratio we have explicitly included in H.R. 1495.

I'm hopeful the Corps will expeditiously complete the project so the residents of Morgan Hill can rest easy in the knowledge that we're protecting them from periodic flood damage.

Again, I want to compliment the chairman for his hard work.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to the time remaining on both sides?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Florida has 12 minutes remaining; the gentleman from Minnesota, 2.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time; and I'll be pleased, if the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) needs additional time, to yield to him in light of the tragedy that has struck his State.

Mr. Speaker, again, my heartfelt sympathies are expressed to any of the Members from Minnesota as they deal with this very difficult tragedy and also to the families who've lost loved ones in the collapse of the span of Interstate 35 West, which I understand connects Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The information I have is that some of the sections were under construction, and the span was closed last night for construction and reopened this morning and scheduled to be closed again tonight. But, unfortunately, we have seen from news accounts a very significant disaster and loss of life in the failure of that infrastructure.

I, too, would pledge my support in working with Chairman OBERSTAR, with the Minnesota delegation and working with this administration and the Congress to bring whatever resources to reopen that span and try to repair that infrastructure.

While we can replace the infrastructure, we can't replace the lives; and, again, our sympathy goes to those who mourn their loved ones tonight.

As we conclude debate on this water resources infrastructure bill, once again we're reminded of the importance of infrastructure, whether it's bridges, dams, the highways that are along our beaches, the natural reserves we have in this country that depend on Congress to protect them and protect that water resource infrastructure.

I yielded earlier to our ranking member and thank him again, Mr. BAKER;

and I said the Good Lord sent us Mr. BAKER to lead the Republican side of the Water Resources Committee. And again, we have the example of the failure of water resource infrastructure, the levees and some of the infrastructure in New Orleans and Louisiana. No one is more knowledgeable, has a better firsthand experience than Mr. BAKER. And this bill also contains a considerable amount of authorization for projects in Louisiana and New Orleans.

Finally, I want to thank, again, Ms. JOHNSON. Next week, I'll get to travel to her district. Under her leadership they bring together all the transportation leaders in the State of Texas for probably one of the country's largest, it's grown to the country's largest infrastructure conferences, and they've asked me to come down and speak and be with them as they plan Texas' policy and transportation projects for the future. I look forward to that opportunity of being with her, and I thank her again for her distinguished leadership and working in a bipartisan fashion to craft this long-overdue legislation.

So again, I thank all of those. I have John Anderson, Mr. Speaker, with me, who represents all of the staff on the Republican side; and I thank the staff on the majority side for their hard work in trying to make this bill a reality.

And, again, I thought of one of the most important projects, as the gentleman from Florida, other gentleman from Florida pointed out tonight, that restoration, the first work on the Everglades being in this bill, important not only to Florida and our districts in Florida but also to the Nation because of the environmental treasure that we're trying to preserve. We do make positive steps towards its restoration and preservation for future generations.

So it's a good bill. I know the President's probably going to veto it. It'll be back here. We're going to, unfortunately, have to override that veto to make this a reality.

But, as I said earlier, the President has to do what he has to do, Congress has to do what the Congress has to do, and we will work together again to make certain that the infrastructure of this country and water resources are preserved for the future.

For the first time since 2000, the Congress is on the verge of passing a major bill authorizing projects, studies, policies, and programs related to the Army Corps of Engineers.

There has been a WRDA introduced in every Congress since 2000, however, controversy always seemed to arise that dashed our hopes for a new authorization bill. Over the years we have worked to bridge the gaps created by those controversies and have arrived at the point where we now have a product that the Congress can approve and send to the President.

This bill has been under development for many years. It is the result of much debate and much compromise. This is not the bill that

any of us in the room would have written, if we were writing a bill by ourselves. However, it is a bill that all of us can support because it addresses important needs of our Nation.

This is a good bill that represents investments in America. These investments will improve trade, protect our homes and businesses from flood damages, and enhance our quality of life by restoring aquatic ecosystems. This legislation ensures our ports and waterways remain viable in the international marketplace by authorizing critical navigation deepening projects. Without these projects shippers will go to other foreign ports like those in Canada and Central America.

For some goods, as much as 50% of the ultimate price paid by the consumer is attributable to transportation costs. Keeping these costs low not only benefits consumers here in the United States, it also makes products produced in the United States more competitive on the world market. Congestion at an outdated lock on a waterway can result in increased costs that rob the farmer of his or her profit. Delay and its associated costs also can rob a farmer of his or her market. This is not a speculative concern.

Recently, improved transportation systems in South America have allowed farmers there to keep their costs low enough to underbid United States grain farmers for customers located in the United States! America's farmers, like the rest of the United States economy, depend on modern and efficient waterways as an integral part of the intermodal transportation system.

Trade builds wealth. But to realize the economic benefits of trade, we must have a modern transportation system. To maintain our place in the global economy, the United States must have modern ports and waterways that can bring the world's goods to our door and make America's products competitive on the world market. Our ports and waterways need to be improved to handle the additional traffic and larger class of ships that we know are coming. This Conference Report addresses these needs in several ways including authorizing improvements to waterways in my home State of Florida, as well as in Texas, Louisiana, and Virginia. In addition, it authorizes 7 new locks and other navigation improvements on the upper Mississippi River.

The WRDA Conference Report authorizes critical projects to provide flood protection to millions of Americans. Flood damage reduction projects save Federal dollars by reducing the probability that disaster relief will have to be used in the future. This bill includes a multitude of projects that protect our cities from floods and coastal storms.

As our Nation has become more environmentally conscious, and sought ways to improve aquatic ecosystems, the Corps of Engineers has become a leader in planning and carrying our environmental restoration projects. This Conference Report is by far the "greenest", most environmentally-friendly Water Resources Development Act ever. The most frequent purpose of new Corps of Engineers project authorizations in this bill is environmental restoration.

This Conference Report contains critical provisions to restore the Everglades. Everglades restoration has been talked about for years, but with the projects authorized in this bill, actual work and construction of projects can begin. Not only is the Everglades vital to

the economy, environment and people of Florida, it is a national treasure that must be cared for and protected for future generations of Americans.

These projects have been brought forward by the Corps in partnership with the State of Florida. The State of Florida has stepped up with their share of funds for these projects. Now that we have these first authorizations, Congress should be supportive of funding this important effort to save a national treasure. These are just the first of what will be many projects over the next several decades to clean up, store, and redirect water for the Everglades.

This bill does not provide guaranteed funding—money will have to be appropriated to meet these authorization levels, but it represents a critical commitment by the Congress to restore an ecological jewel of the United States. This legislation will help ensure a revitalized Everglades for generations to come.

Also addressed in this bill are policy issues that improve how the Corps of Engineers does projects. We have instituted an Independent Peer Review into the Corps' planning process to enhance the agency's credibility. We are improving project monitoring to determine if the projects are performing as designed.

I know that some are not happy with the size of this bill; however, we must remember that the Conference Report represents the pent-up demand of 3 WRDA bills. This legislation is overdue by 5 years. And if we wait any longer it will just be a bigger bill, because the Nation's needs are not going away by themselves. We must address them like we are doing here today.

I want to thank Don YOUNG, the former chairman of this Committee, who worked for many years to resolve the difficult issues surrounding this bill; and also Jimmy Duncan who chaired our Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee for 6 years and worked closely with the Ranking Members JERRY COSTELLO and PETER DEFAZIO to create many of the compromises that made this Conference Report possible.

I certainly want to thank you, Chairman OBERSTAR, for your leadership over the years both as Ranking Member and now as Chairman of the Full Committee. It has been very rewarding to work with you on this bill and it shows what we can accomplish when we work together in a bipartisan way to address the Nation's needs.

Under the leadership of Senator BOXER and Senator INHOFE, the Senate passed a bill that included many of the same projects addressed in the House bill. I think it is appropriate that the package before us today represents a compromise of the House and Senate bills into a good product that both chambers can proudly support.

Lastly, I want to thank the staff of the Full Committee, Jim Coon, Amy Steinmann, Charlie Ziegler, and Jason Rosa. I also want to thank the staff of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, John Anderson, Geoff Bowman, and William Collum for their dedication in finishing the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.

And on Mr. OBERSTAR's staff, I want to thank David Heymsfeld and Ward McCarragher of the Full Committee, and especially the Subcommittee staff of Ryan Seiger, Ted Illston, Beth Goldstein, and Mike Brain.

I urge all Members to support the Conference Report.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. OBERSTAR. I thank the gentleman very much for his kind words, for his prayers and his thoughts about our fellow Minnesotans and the tragedy that's occurred this evening; and I join my prayers with his and those of my colleagues who spoke earlier this evening on that bridge collapse. We certainly keep the members, the family members and the victims in our prayers as we go forth this evening.

We reach a milestone this evening with this legislation. I said at the outset and I say it again, this is a historic moment. We have accomplished in 7 months what it has taken 7 years to put together, but it is a good bill, and it is evidence that this body can and does work together constructively for the common good, for the purpose of building a better Nation, for moving people and goods efficiently and effectively in the domestic economy.

Getting us to this point was not easy. The staff had to put in long hours, as the gentleman from Florida already expressed.

□ 2145

I want to specifically mention Ryan Seiger, Beth Goldstein, Ted Illston and Mike Brain on the Democratic side; John Anderson, Geoff Bowman, William Collum and Tracy Mosebey on the Republican side; Rod Hall, Chairwoman JOHNSON's staff member; Stewart Crigler, staffer for Ranking Member BAKER.

From the Office of Legislative Counsel: David Mendelsohn, Curt Haensel, Heather Arpin over in the Senate, and Rosemary Gallagher.

And from the Senate staff: Ken Kopocis, Jeff Rosato, Tyler Rushford, Angie Giancarlo, Jo-Ellen Darcy, Mike Quiello and Let Mon Lee.

All worked very closely together to craft this legislation, spending enormous amounts of time, weekends. While Members were back home in their respective districts, staff were here in this oppressive heat of Washington, although, I think, comforted by air conditioning at least, but putting in extraordinarily long hours to craft this bill, bridge the gaps, reach agreements, report back to Members so that we could be here this evening.

It is a significant moment for America, for this Congress to have this comprehensive water resources bill together. And, again, I express great appreciation to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) for the time that he has spent and the cooperation that we have had; the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) for the time that she has devoted, for her care, concern, and energy; and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER), who put his heart and soul into this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I would like to

submit into the RECORD a letter from E.G. Pittman, Chairman of the Texas Water Development Board, strongly supporting the passage of this conference report.

The State of Texas has recently completed a nationally recognized comprehensive water plan. Provisions in H.R. 1495 would greatly assist the State in addressing changes in the population, water availability and quality, technological improvements, and promotes increased collaboration with the Corps of Engineers.

TEXAS WATER DEVELOPMENT BOARD,
Austin, TX, August 1, 2007.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Hon. JAMES L. OBERSTAR,
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure, Washington, DC.

Hon. JOHN A. BOEHNER,
House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Hon. JOHN L. MICA,
Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Washington, DC.

DEAR HOUSE LEADERS: The Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) strongly supports the passage of H.R. 1495 by the end of this week. The conference report on the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) embodies seven years of deliberations on this important and urgent issue. Further delays are incomprehensible after such protracted discussions have finally resulted in a bill that is a crucial step towards addressing the nation's water resources needs, which have accumulated since the last WRDA was enacted.

The Nation can no longer wait for passage of this important piece of legislation. We are faced with numerous water resources challenges that over time have increased and continue to increase in cost and urgency. We cannot afford to neglect this flood of needs because they will only grow and not dissipate.

WRDA's time is now. I appreciate your leadership in acknowledging the importance of H.R. 1495, and I look forward to a successful House vote on the bill this week. If you or your staffs would like to further discuss this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me, or Dave Mitamura of my staff.

Respectfully,

E. G. ROD PITTMAN,
Chairman.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Subcommittee on Water Resources and the full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for reporting out the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) and getting through conference so we can send a bill to the President.

The previous two Congresses have failed to do so, and because of that, much needed flood control projects in Houston, TX, had been put on hold. I appreciate the inclusion of our language for the Halls Bayou Federal Flood Control Project in Houston, which will allow the Harris County Flood Control District, HCFCD, to start work on this project in the near future.

Historic flooding along Halls Bayou has been severe and frequent in some neighborhoods. During Tropical Storm Allison in June 2001, Halls Bayou was hit very hard, with more than 8,000 homes flooding within the watershed. No project can keep all homes from flooding, but a project can help reduce

the risk of flooding for a significant number of families, reducing the need for Federal assistance, property damage, and loss of life.

The purpose of section 5157 of this legislation which pertains to Halls Bayou is to allow the HCFCD to conduct the General Reevaluation Review, GRR, and any subsequent Federal interest project on Halls Bayou. The Corps is limited in its staff, resources, and time with the many projects in the Galveston District and the Southwest Division. Local project sponsors with the necessary expertise, like Harris County, can provide efficiency by becoming more involved.

Halls Bayou, a major tributary of Greens Bayou, was authorized in WRDA 1990 as part of the Buffalo Bayou and Tributaries Project. The original Halls Bayou authorization assumed the Greens Bayou project in place, which is now finishing a GRR. Results indicate that the work on Greens Bayou downstream of Halls Bayou will not have Federal work, although it will have significant local projects. Therefore, a GRR is now needed for Halls Bayou as well.

While conducting the GRR to find a possible Federal interest, Harris County can begin project implementation in order to reduce future flood damage as soon as possible. Adding Halls Bayou to Section 211(f) allows Harris County to be reimbursed if the project is later approved by the Secretary. I thank the Subcommittee, full Committee, and the Conference for their work on this issue.

I support this bill and the balance that it strikes between the need to improve water resources for human purposes and to preserve our water uses for the environment and future generations. The projects in this bill are much needed, and I'm pleased the conference committee was able to complete its work so we can get a bill to the President.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman OBERSTAR and Ranking Member MICA, as well as Subcommittee Chairwoman JOHNSON and Ranking Member BAKER and the committee staffs for their hard work and leadership on this important legislation—the first water improvement and conservation package in seven years.

Following several earlier impasses, I want to take this opportunity to commend the spirit of bipartisan and bicameral compromise on this important measure.

This bill benefits all Americans and their families who use and enjoy our Nation's waterways, public beaches—including over 300 miles of coastline along my district—and for U.S. businesses that depend on healthy and viable waterways throughout the country.

My district benefits from the good work that the Army Corps of Engineers does for coastal communities by helping small towns deal with multiple concerns ranging from erosion to longstanding environmental challenges. WRDA will allow the Corps to continue work on several projects on eastern Long Island that will protect the TWA Flight 800 Memorial, restore the quality of the Long Island Sound watershed, protect the famous Montauk Lighthouse, and continue environmental monitoring of the Atlantic coast of Long Island.

In addition, H.R. 1495 will go a long way toward supplying the Corps with all the resources it needs to protect coastal communities and vacationers by modernizing project planning and approval.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman and ranking member again for their hard work on this

issue, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to make sure that we get a WRDA bill to the President as soon as we can. We simply cannot afford to let another year go by without passing this legislation.

Mr. COSTELLO. Mr. Speaker, today we are considering the conference report for the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. This has been 7 years in the making to enact a WRDA bill that addresses the critical infrastructure needs of our country.

I would like to thank Chairman OBERSTAR, Chairwoman JOHNSON, Mr. MICA, and Mr. BAKER for a job well done in bringing this conference report to the floor today.

Without their strong leadership, dedication, and persistence we would not have a final conference report on the floor today.

I am pleased that projects for major flood control, navigation, environmental restoration, and other water resource projects, including projects in my congressional district, are being authorized.

I am also pleased we are finally authorizing the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Waterway system project. This project is extremely vital to the State of Illinois and the Nation because we are going to be able to move commerce more efficiently and effectively.

Modernizing that infrastructure is the right thing to do—it is a necessity—and I am glad to see this bill is moving forward on such a significant project to our economy and commerce.

Mr. Speaker, I again salute and thank Chairman OBERSTAR, Chairwoman JOHNSON, Mr. MICA, and Mr. BAKER for their leadership and hard work. I strongly support this conference report and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. BAKER. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Port of New Orleans and the economic and business interests throughout the State of Louisiana that rely on the maritime trade and commerce through the Port, I am especially pleased today to commend the conferees on H.R. 1495, the Water Resources Development Act of 2007, WRDA, for their support of the navigation project to improve access to the Port's Napoleon Avenue Container Terminal. Section 1004(a)(7) of the WRDA conference report will allow the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge and maintain a channel leading to the Napoleon Avenue Container Terminal berthing area at a depth not to exceed the authorized channel depth of the Mississippi River Ship Channel. This will ensure that the transportation benefits of the authorized channel depth of the Mississippi River Ship Channel will continue to be realized by the adjacent Port terminal and the larger container and other oceangoing vessels that desire to use that facility. This small navigation enhancement project will create significant economic and business benefits for the Port, and aid in the continuing recovery of the greater New Orleans area. I thank Chairman JIM OBERSTAR and Ranking Member JOHN MICA of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for their support of this initiative in the vital WRDA legislation.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the previous question is ordered on the conference report.

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the conference report.

