"Today's bill would bar New York State from receiving any restoration funding from the EPA, and leave the Great Lakes to be overrun by private polluters and invasive species"

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee and Co-Chair of the Great Lakes Task Force, today defended the Great Lakes from a Republican provision that would ban our state from receiving any funding for the Lakes putting millions of dollars and the health of the Lakes at risk.

While speaking on the Interior Appropriations bill, Slaughter bashed a provision inserted in the bill that would punish New York for its regulatory standards to keep invasive species out of the Great Lakes.

In part she said:

"Twenty percent of the freshwater on this planet resides in the Great Lakes. Most of us who reside around the Great Lakes believe it is our responsibility to take of them and pass them on to future generations. But in recent years the Great Lakes have been damaged by pollution and invasive species carried to our waters by foreign vessels. We have allowed that. New York, of course being closest to the Atlantic Ocean and St. Lawrence Seaway, New York has enacted stronger laws against dumping ballast and this bill punishes us for doing that…Today's bill would bar New York State from receiving any restoration funding from the EPA, and leave the Great Lakes to be overrun by private polluters and the invasive species they have delivered from overseas. Any bill that stands up for foreign shipping magnates but won't provide a cent to help Americans should never see the light of day, and will never receive my vote."

Her full remarks are included below.

Video of her statement is available here .

An amendment inserted in the Interior Appropriations Bill would prohibit Great Lakes states from receiving any Great Lakes Restoration funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) if they have stricter regulations regarding ballast water dumping than national standards. New York State, which has some of the strictest ballast water regulations in the nation, would be disproportionately affected by this amendment.

Large ships traveling through the Great Lakes typically carry large amounts of ballast water taken on in waters from one region, like the Atlantic Ocean, and then discharged at the next port of call, in the Great Lakes. Because the ballast water discharged typically contains bacteria, viruses, animals and plants, this is the primary way invasive species to be introduced into the Great Lakes disrupting our natural ecosystem.

Once introduced aquatic invasive species are very rarely eradicated, and extremely difficult to

control. They feed on and out-compete native fish and other aquatic wildlife, foul beaches, degrade fisheries, clog water intake pipes and other infrastructure, disrupt the food chain, and contaminate drinking water.

Aquatic invasive species cost the region's citizens, businesses, utilities and cities at least $200 million annually in damages. These costs are only expected to rise over time if strong protections are not put in place to stop the next invasion.

For this reason, New York has proudly stood at the forefront of developing protective ballast discharge standards and is clearly threatened by today's legislation since the state has set tougher standards and timelines.

At risk is funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and federal programs that provide for clean drinking water and the cleanup of brownfield sites.

The Interior Appropriations bill is expected to be voted on this week.

Slaughter serves a Co-Chair of the Great Lakes Task Force, a bipartisan and bicameral organization of lawmakers dedicated to improving economic and environmental health of the Great Lakes. She was instrumental in ensuring $475 million in federal funding for the GLRI in FY 2010, testifying in front of the House Budget Committee and organizing her colleagues to support adequate funding. Through their efforts, GLRI is expected to receive an additional $300 million in FY2011, and $475 million each year for the three years following that. For her testimony in front of the House Budget Committee in March 2009, click here.

Slaughter's Remarks

M. Speaker,

In these tough times, we must make choices that reflect our values, and our belief that we solve our toughest problems through shared sacrifice and working together. Unfortunately, today we consider yet another bill that is devoid of these values. Once again, today's legislation places the burden on the American people while rewarding special interests and the lobbyists who walk these halls.

One of the many riders inserted into the bill will effectively open up a million acres of national forest and other public land around Grand Canyon National Park to new uranium mining claims. Democrats have concerns about maintaining the integrity of the Grand Canyon and the effect of uranium mining on water quality, not to mention the spectacle of auctioning off a national treasure with the proceeds going to mostly foreign-owned entities, including Russia's state atomic energy corporation and South Korea's state-owned utility.

At the same time, the majority proposes crippling cuts to the EPA that will gut programs that protect our air and water. I can think of few more important responsibilities than making sure that when a child goes to the kitchen sink, the water coming out is safe. If our nation cannot

protect these most basic of life necessities, then we have indeed fallen far.

Today's bill would also prohibit the use of government money to add animals to the endangered species list, but allows the use of government money to take species off that very same list. This policy change threatens the Endangered Species Act, and the environmental protections that come with it.

The misguided priorities in this bill would directly impact my district and the citizens I'm elected to represent. My colleague is right about that, but not just them. Twenty percent of the freshwater on this planet resides in the Great Lakes. Most of us who reside around the Great Lakes believe it is our responsibility to take of them and pass them on to future generations. Bit in recent years the Great Lakes have been damaged by pollution and invasive species carried to our waters by foreign vessels. We have allowed that. New York, of course being closest to the Atlantic Ocean and St. Lawrence Seaway, New York has enacted stronger laws against dumping ballast and this bill punishes us for doing that.

These invasive species are damaging not just an ecosystem, but a way of life for the Great Lake communities that line the shore and as well endangering our fresh water. The EPA has come to the aid of these communities by dedicating funding to restore the Great Lakes. However, today's bill would bar New York State from receiving any restoration funding from the EPA, and leave the Great Lakes to be overrun by private polluters and the invasive species they have delivered from overseas. Any bill that stands up for foreign shipping magnates but won't provide a cent to help Americans should never see the light of day, and will never receive my vote.

Today's legislation also harms the arts. If today's bill takes effect, the National Endowment for the Arts will have lost 20 percent of its funding in two years. These cuts target a program that works. In FY 2010, we invested $167.5 million into the NEA for the purpose of providing funding to non-profits arts organizations. The funding created $166.2 billion in total economic activity, supported 5.7 million jobs, and generated $12.6 billion in tax revenue to the United States Treasury and that does not count what goes into state and local treasuries. Today’s legislation targets a program that is proven to create jobs, and contribute to economic and cultural well being of our nation. You would think the Majority would invest more into a program as successful as the NEA, yet here we are cutting their budget again. But no, here they are cutting the budget once again.

Our country is blessed with stunning natural beauty and a wealth of natural resources that are unparalleled anywhere in the world. But in one final swipe at our national interest, today's bill cuts the budget for the Land and Water Conservation Fund by a whopping 78 percent. The Land and Water Conservation Fund ensures that our national treasurers will be here for our children and grandchildren - a mission that apparently deserves 78 percent less money than it did a year before. A cut like this says all you need to know about the priorities of the Majority and the special interests being served.

If getting our fiscal house in order is truly about shared sacrifice, this bill does not reflect it. We could have started by asking oil and gas companies to pay their fair share, after profiting so

richly from resources found on American soil. Instead, the Majority rejected an amendment that would have asked oil and gas companies to pay a little bit more so that our nation can fund programs to clean up the most polluted lands in our country. The Majority will not even allow this amendment to receive a vote on the floor.

Today's bill asks nothing of the companies that are making record profits, and instead cuts the programs, services and agencies that serve the American people and protect our environment for future generations.

M. Speaker, a bill like this does not reflect our values, and is not up to the standard the American people expect and deserve. It puts special interests over our general welfare and it fails to invest in our future. We can and we should do better.

I reserve the balance of my time.