

May 19 2005 - Republicans Block Clean Water Amendment Aimed at Helping District Communities

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Rep. Slaughter's Amendment Would Have Provided Resources to Local Towns and Cities

Washington, DC - Last night, House Rules Committee Republicans blocked on a party line vote an attempt by Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), the committee's Ranking Member, to restore funding to The Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The amendment to the 2006 Interior, Environment Appropriations Bill which Rep. Slaughter offered in the Rules Committee on behalf of Rep. David Obey (D-WI), would have provided for an additional \$500 million, restoring funding for this important program to its 2004 level.

"Local governments needed Congress to stand beside them on this issue. Unfortunately, the Republican Leadership has yet again stood in their way blocking sensible legislation from ever seeing the light of day," said Rep. Slaughter.

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) is a keystone of the Clean Water Act. It established a lasting federal commitment towards investment in sewage treatment infrastructure improvements throughout the country, and is integral to our national commitment to improving water quality. The revolving fund helps local communities meet water quality standards, repair and replace old and decaying pipelines and treatment plants and ensure continued progress toward restoring the health and safety of America's water bodies.

"The Clean Water State Revolving Fund is extremely important to towns and cities throughout America as they struggle to meet clean water regulations and provide clean water for their communities. Without this additional money the safety of our water supply is left in jeopardy," said Rep. Slaughter. She continued, "

Within the 28th Congressional district, the town of Tonawanda said in February that they would have to spend over \$200 million in the next few decades to eliminate sanitary sewer overflows, which occur when heavy rain or snowmelt cause sanitary sewers to spill over into storm sewers. Likewise, Buffalo recently conducted a \$7 million study on how to fix similar problems. They now estimate the cost to address their problems will exceed \$160 million. Had Rep. Slaughter's amendment passed, more federal funding would have been available to Tonawanda, Buffalo and hundreds of other towns and cities just like them.

"I will continue to fight for additional funding for the CWSRF and hope that my colleagues will come to their senses. Clean water is not a luxury...it is a necessity," said Rep. Slaughter.

BACKGROUND:

Decreasing Funding of the Clean Water SRF Accounts (FY 2004-2006 Appropriations)

STATE

FY2004

Enacted

FY2005

Enacted

FY2004-05

CUT

FY2006

Proposed

FY2005-06

CUT

FY2004-06

Total Cut

New York

\$146,280,931

\$118940081

-\$27,340,850

\$92,649,440

-\$26,290,641

-\$53,631,481

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund is the key federal program for helping local communities with sewage treatment infrastructure. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund is a keystone of the Clean Water Act. It established a lasting federal commitment towards investment in sewage treatment infrastructure improvements throughout the country, and is integral to our national commitment to improving water quality. The revolving fund helps local communities meet water quality standards, repair and replace old and decaying pipelines and treatment plants, and ensure continued progress toward restoring the health and safety of America's water bodies.

Enactment of this bill will result in slashing Clean Water funds by 37 percent over two years. The cut in Clean Water funds in this bill is truly unacceptable. The GOP Congress already cut these Clean Water funds in FY 2005 by \$251 million - or by 19 percent. And now, in the FY 2006 Interior-Environment Appropriations bill, Republicans are cutting this program again - this time by \$241 million, or 22 percent. If this bill is enacted, the Clean Water program would have been slashed by 37 percent over two short years.

Although progress has been made under the Clean Water Act, much more needs to be done. Since its enactment in 1972, the Clean Water Act has resulted in significant improvements in the water quality of our streams, lakes, estuaries, and coastal waters. However, much more needs to be done. The EPA estimates that approximately 45 percent of assessed waters nationwide do not yet fully meet water quality standards. This means these water bodies do not meet the basic goal of the Clean Water Act - that they be safe for uses like swimming, fishing, or as a drinking water source.

The Congress is cutting Clean Water funds right when many sewage treatment systems have exceeded their effective lives and are crumbling. Unfortunately, many cities and communities throughout the United States are facing a critical juncture in the age and reliability of their sewage treatment infrastructure. Symptoms of the problem include aging pipes that leak or break and associated storm water runoff that overwhelms treatment capacity. Between 23,000 and 75,000 sewage overflows occur nationwide every year, resulting in the release of 3 billion to 10 billion gallons of untreated wastewater, according to EPA estimates.

Between \$300 billion and \$400 billion is needed over next 20 years in investments in sewage treatment infrastructure. The EPA's most recent assessments of sewage treatment infrastructure needs estimate that between \$300 billion and \$400 billion in investments is needed for restoration and replacement of the nation's aging sewage treatment infrastructure over the next 20 years. In addition, according to a new EPA report, without continued improvements in sewage treatment infrastructure, future population growth will erode away many of the achievements of the last 33 years in cleaning up the nation's waters.

As a result of exposure to raw sewage, millions of Americans get sick every year. As a result of exposure to raw sewage, millions of Americans get sick every year after swimming in or drinking contaminated water. Victims usually contract gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses, which can actually be life-threatening for children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. Incredibly, at a time when Americans face a clear and present danger from dirty water, Republicans are cutting the funding to ensure clean water for communities at risk.

Democrats simply fighting to restore Clean Water funding to the FY 2004 level. As study after study has showed, the need of state and local communities for this Clean Water funding is growing - with new investments desperately needed in aging sewage treatment infrastructure. And yet, at this time of great need, the GOP-controlled Congress is slashing Clean Water funding - with this bill calling for a 37 percent cut over a two-year period. Democrats are simply calling for restoring Clean Water funding to its FY 2004 enacted level - a modest request.

