

## **Chairman Dicks Statement Subcommittee Markup FY 2009 Interior and the Environment Appropriations Bill**

**WASHINGTON** – Today, Norm Dicks (D-WA), Chairman of the House Interior and the Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, made the following statement at the subcommittee markup of the FY 2009 bill.

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"I am very pleased to present to the Subcommittee recommendations for the 2009 Interior and Environment Appropriations. These recommendations are the product of a very deliberate and bi-partisan process. Our subcommittee held 20 separate hearings on the President's budget with more than 200 witnesses. These witnesses included agency officials, Members of Congress, more than 100 tribal leaders and many other public witnesses. The recommendations in this bill, especially those related to Native American programs, flow directly from these hearings. Mr. Tiahrt and I have also discussed the bill many times since the hearings concluded on April 9th, and the Majority and Minority Committee staff have spent scores of hours working as a team putting the Members' recommendations into today's proposal.

"I believe the Interior & Environment Subcommittee has been a model of bi-partisanship. While not suggesting that Mr. Tiahrt supports every single recommendation, I believe it is fair to characterize this bill, as well as the process through which it was developed, as fully bi-partisan.

"Former Chairman Sid Yates often reminded Subcommittee Members that the basic responsibility of the Subcommittee on Interior was to be good stewards. The stewardship responsibilities include fulfilling our obligations to Native Americans, protecting our natural and historic heritage, and preserving the biodiversity of the American landscape. They also include providing the resources to ensure that our air and water are clean, and that the energy and other natural resources on public lands are developed to meet public needs in an environmentally responsible way.

"Unfortunately, the funding proposed by the President for fiscal year 2009 was entirely inadequate to meet these challenges. His proposal would have reduced the budgets for Interior and Environment programs by almost \$1 billion. This meant that, in the aggregate, his budget was \$1.6 billion below the level necessary to maintain current services. I do not believe it is an understatement to say that Members on both sides of the aisle were appalled by many of his specific proposals and the impacts they would have had on the public. His budget requests for Native Americans and for the US. Forest Service were particularly irresponsible.

"The bill before the Members today rejects these cuts and provides \$27.9 billion for Interior and Environment programs. Instead of cutting critical programs, it provides an increase of \$1.3 billion, or about 4.9 percent, over the 2008 enacted level

"Fortunately, the FY 2009 budget allocation provided by Chairman Obey for our Subcommittee gives us a reasonable amount of funds to both reject the reductions proposed in the budget and to make significant new investments. Mr. Tiahrt and I, in putting together our recommendations, have tried to target these funds where there is the greatest need and where there is broad Member and public support.

"The single largest increase in the bill is for programs serving Native Americans. The President's request would have cut funding for these agencies by \$121 million, and approval of this request would have meant a loss of health care services for more than 100,000 Indians. As examples, had this budget been approved, there would have been 21 8,000 less clinic visits for Indian families, 12,000 fewer dental visits and 1,500 fewer mammography screenings. With Indians already experience diabetes rates three times the rate of other Americans and having dramatically higher mortality rates in many other areas, approval of this budget would have been devastating.

"Indian schools and social services would have been cut by \$100 million. The \$6 billion recommended in the bill for the Indian Health Service and the BIA is \$350 million over the 2008 enacted level for these programs. We believe this long overdue investment is the largest increase ever provided for Indian programs. \$181 million of the increase will go directly to clinical health services at IHS. There are additional investments for recruitment of health professionals and initiatives to help the tribes in dealing with the methamphetamine and domestic violence problems, which were discussed in detail at the hearings. The bill also includes \$118 million over the request for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide significant increases for Indian law enforcement, education, community development and construction.

"The bill includes \$2.6 billion for the National Parks. This includes a \$158 million increase in funding for the operational budgets of our parks. Every one of the 391 units of the Park Service will benefit from this increase. The 2009 bill continues the multi-year effort initiated in 2008 to restore the parks for the Centennial of the National Park Service in 2016. The bill does not, however, provide any funding for Centennial matching grants in 2009. Funding for this program is being handled as mandatory spending by the authorizing committees, as proposed by the President.

"The bill includes \$469 million for the National Wildlife Refuge system, an increase of \$35 million over the 2008 level. These refuges have been desperately understaffed, with almost 200 of our wildlife refuges having no staff at all to protect the wildlife and serve the visitors. The bill provides an increase of \$473 million over the President's request for the U.S. Forest Service, not including firefighting costs. The President had proposed almost \$400 million of reductions which would have devastated this agency. The bill restores those cuts and provides increases for inflation. Within this total, the bill includes \$70 million for the legacy road program started last year. This initiative attempts to fund the costs of decommissioning roads no longer required, benefitting both forest and watershed health. \$2.97 billion is provided for the wildland fire accounts of the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior. This is \$141 million above the level requested by the President and \$217 million above the 2008 enacted level. This amount maintains fire fighter staffing and preparedness funding as well as the \$1 94 million increase requested for fire suppression operations.

"I know every Member of this Committee is frustrated by the challenge of ever increasing budgets for fighting wildfires. They are equally frustrated by the damage which occurs when agencies are forced to borrow money to fight fires from their base program budgets. This bill continues to provide more money for fires, but it tries to stop the irrational borrowing of funds from critical projects. We have done this by including bill language which prohibits this borrowing unless the President has submitted a formal budget request to Congress to replace the funds. This request must be signed by the President before any funds can be reallocated for fire.

"The bill also includes an increase of \$175 million to begin a multi-year effort to revitalize the National Mall area of the nation's capital, an area often referred to as "America's Front Yard." As Members who have walked the Mall grounds recently know, the National Mall has deteriorated due to lack of investment in necessary maintenance and critical upgrades. The plan for the National Mall has not been updated since the McMillan Plan of 1902, despite a dramatic increase in the number of people coming and a parallel increase in the type of events hosted on the Mall. \$100 million of the new funding recommended in the bill is for National Park Service projects on the Mall, and \$75 million is to fund essential repairs at the Arts & Industries Building of the Smithsonian, which has been closed for three years because of safety concerns.

"The bill includes a total of \$7.8 billion for environmental protection programs at the EPA, an increase of \$689 million over the budget request and \$371 million above the 2008 enacted level. These funds will help clean our air, make our water safe for the public and our ecosystems, and protect our land from dangerous toxic wastes. The Committee has restored over \$38 million for state air grants, increased the amount for diesel emissions reduction grants to \$65 million, provided \$45 million more than requested to restore and protect our nation's greatest bodies of water, and added \$50 million to programs which protect our land from hazardous chemicals and wastes. In addition, \$850 million is included for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, \$295 million more than requested in the President's budget. This amount will fund approximately 300 additional low interest loans to local communities to upgrade their wastewater systems to meet national standards.

"Finally, in terms of money, the bill includes \$160 million for the National Endowments for the Arts and \$160 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities, an increase of \$30 million for the two endowments. These highly effective agencies support the preservation and encouragement of America's cultural heritage, but they are still funded substantially below the 1994 levels.

"With respect to legislative language, the bill largely maintains language carried in previous years by the House. With respect to the issue of energy development on the Outer Continental Shelf, which will be discussed by Mr. Peterson in a few minutes, the bill before the Members today carries the exact same provisions as in current law. This is exactly the same language requested by the president. I don't agree with this President on many things but I agree with him that opening up more of the Outer Continental Shelf to drilling is unnecessary. Proponents of opening additional lands to oil and gas leasing assert that vast quantities of oil and gas are closed to energy development. In fact, MMS estimates that 82 percent of the known OCS reserves of natural gas and 79 percent of the known OCS reserves of oil are in areas already fully open for drilling.

"The situation on-shore is similar. Onshore, 72% of oil and 84% of natural gas resources are either fully accessible now, or will be accessible pending the completion of land-use planning and environmental reviews. Between 1999 and 2007, drilling permits for oil and gas development on public lands increased more than 361%.

"The bill before the Members also carries language which was offered by Mr Hinchey last year and which passed the House dealing with faulty oil and gas leases. These faulty leases, which were issued through an administrative error in the last 1990's, create potential losses for the U.S. taxpayers of approximately \$9 billion. Mr. Hinchey's language attempts to ensure that the oil companies, which are experiencing record profits, renegotiate the leases in a fair manner. Beyond these two provisions, I am not aware of controversy with respect to legislative language.

"In summary, Mr. Tiahrt and I have worked very hard to make sure this bill is the result of a thorough and non-partisan review. We have not agreed on every element of the bill, but we have worked together to ensure that funding has been allocated to the highest priority needs. I hope this bill can be supported by every Member of this Subcommittee.

"With respect to amendments this afternoon, I will ask Members to defer until Full Committee policy related language proposals. If a member chooses to do otherwise, however, that is his or her right. With respect to money issues, if Members see areas this afternoon where they would like to see increases or decreases from the amounts in my mark, they should feel free to offer amendments at Subcommittee. I do not claim that this proposal is perfect. Of course, if a member wants to add money, he or she will also need an offset. We have no quarrel, process wise, however, with money amendments to our mark. They often make the bill stronger."