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Saxton: Funds for LBI Beach Repairs in Budget

\$2.5M for construction in 2007 budget for 1st time

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jim Saxton (NJ-3rd) announced today that efforts to include more funding to repair years of erosion on Long Beach Island (LBI) have been successful.

"This is terrific news because it's the first time we've received construction funding in the President's budget for LBI," Saxton said. "I credit this to six months of contact with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, including the chief, Lt. Gen. Strock last summer."

Saxton said the corps has studied LBI erosion problem for years and determined that wide beaches and grassy dunes are the best ways to protect the barrier island from storm surges caused hurricanes and nor'easters. Millions of dollars in damage to public property, businesses and homes could occur should another breach in the island recur similar to the huge storm of 1962.

Funding in the amount of \$2.5 million is included in the Administration's 2007 Energy and Water Development budget.

"We are in a very tough fiscal environment in Washington," Saxton said. "I'm pleased to see the corps prioritized this funding despite. We've been working very hard with them and they understand the stakes."

Congress is facing a budget crunch due to the billions of dollars used to respond to hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. Saxton noted that the devastation of New Orleans, caused when Hurricane Katrina breached levies, may have been lessened had the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers warnings that existing levies could only withstand category 3 hurricanes.

"I think we all need to heed the advice of the USACE," he said. "They have studied LBI for years. Should a mega-storm hit LBI and its six small towns and 8,000 year-round residents, we could see Katrina-like destruction."

Saxton was able to get about \$3 million in engineering funds for the LBI project in the 1990s and early 2000s, plus \$1.75 million for construction in 2004 and 2005. In 2005, Saxton obtained \$5 million for the LBI project in the fiscal year 2006 budget. The funds were later added in the Senate. The first pumping of millions of tons of sand is expected to begin in 2006 or early 2007.

Using funds Saxton acquired in 2004-2005, the USACE on Sept. 24 awarded a \$400,000 to \$500,000 contract for the initial phase of construction – trucking about 16,000 tons of sand onto the beach in Harvey Cedars over about 45 days. Although relatively small, that phase made the LBI project officially underway. The main phase involves pumping of seven million tons of sand over 3-5 years along the 17-mile long island.

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