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No access, no funding

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Rep. H. James Saxton, R-N.J., recently announced that \$5 million has been set aside in the 2006 federal budget for beach replenishment on Long Beach Island. Not a penny of it should be released until the beach access issues there are fully resolved.

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The lack of public access has stalled the replenishment project in Long Beach Island for a decade. And rightly so. Public money should not be spent replacing sand on what amount beaches of affluent property owners in the Loveladies and North Beach sections of Long Beach — or anywhere else along the Jersey Shore.

The state Department of Environmental Protection, which contributes about one-third of the replenishment funding, has repeatedly pledged not to allocate money for the Long Beach adequate access and parking is provided in Loveladies and North Beach. It must make good commitment. It also should insist that the beaches on Long Beach Island have changing facilities and restrooms.

According to a DEP spokesman, the access issues in Long Beach Township have yet to be resolved. Long Beach commissioner says the township and property owners are close to settling the issues. Close isn't good enough.

Jeff Sagnip-Hollendonner, a Saxton spokesman, said the Army Corps of Engineers will provide the replenishment work in the parts of Long Beach Island where public access is not an issue. The replenishment project should be considered as a whole. No part of it should be approved if any of the island's six municipalities have documented that they have provided adequate public parking and amenities.

The state and federal governments have been far too tolerant of communities that have discouraged public use of their beaches. With towns charging up to \$8 a day for the right to use the beach, not to mention bringing in millions of dollars from parking revenues, the state has an obligation to ensure the beaches are easily accessible and provide the basic amenities needed to enjoy them.

Some of Long Beach Island has failed to meet that standard. It shouldn't receive any public money until it does.

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