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Saxton Asks NJ DEP to Be Flexible on LBI Beach Plan

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Rep. Jim Saxton (NJ-3rd) today called on the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (N.J. DEP) to ease its stringent requirements that could delay the long-awaited Long Beach Island beach repair project.

N.J. DEP has pushed the six small towns on the narrow barrier islands to construct quarter-mile access sites (double the federal guidelines), including buying land, building parking lots, bathroom buildings and other construction, which could place a significant burden of time and money on the municipalities. Only about 8,000 people inhabit the island.

"It has taken us more than a decade to get this far, working with Republican and Democrat administrations in both Trenton and Washington," Saxton said. "Now I'm afraid N.J. DEP is adding such stringent requirements that it could put the project in jeopardy. I encourage DEP to work with the towns, not against them, to ensure reasonable public access and find ways to improve public access, not impose harsh conditions and financial hardships on LBI residents."

In a letter to Acting N.J. DEP Commissioner Lisa Jackson, Saxton said that he and then-Sen. Jon Corzine worked against the odds to bring the project to fruition. He told Jackson that the costs to meet the N.J. DEP requirements would be "astronomical."

"It is my hope DEP will reconsider its access requirement, keeping in mind the critical nature of the beach project in providing adequate protection for the residents of Long Beach Island and their property against any future storms," the letter states.

Saxton added funding for the first main phase of the construction, \$5 million in the 2006 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act. Years earlier, he made sure that the federal government would pay 65 percent of the cost of the LBI project, one of the last in the country at that favorable rate. Due to budgetary reasons, future construction projects are not only expected to be unlikely, but are also expected to be funded as low as 35 percent by the federal government.

"Long Beach Island's battered beaches are in need of critical repairs," Saxton said.

"This is the plan that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has advised that we should build to protect our six towns against hurricanes or Nor'Easters. In the wake of Katrina and New Orleans, I'd say that we would be wise in taking the corps' advice. The fact that the federal government is funding 65 percent of the total cost of the LBI project will save the state millions of dollars."

Between 1994 and 2003, Saxton was able to obtain about \$3 million in engineering funds for the LBI project, and \$1.75 million for construction in 2004 and 2005. In May 2005, Saxton obtained the \$5 million for the LBI project in the fiscal year 2006 House budget. The funds were later added in the Senate.

Although this past fall a 900-foot section of eroded beach in Harvey Cedars was bolstered with 16,000 tons of sand trucked in from the mainland, the first major phase involves the pumping of millions of tons of off-shore sand, and is expected to begin in late 2006 or early 2007. The main phases involve pumping seven million tons of sand over 3-5 years along the 17-mile long island.

A copy of the letter is available at (609) 261-5801.

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