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## EDITORIAL

By Bill Swichtenberg



## Pork: Rotten to the Corps

A group of Senators has introduced legislation that could stop more than \$15 billion of water projects and increase the accountability for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Senators Robert Smith (R-N.H.), Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) have introduced the Corps of Engineers Modernization and Improvement Act of 2002, in what could be the biggest battle over perceived "pork barrel" spending in years.

The bill proposes reforming the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by addressing the \$52 billion backlog, improving project criteria, instituting a system of independent peer review for projects and increasing non-federal cost-sharing requirements.

The history of the United States Army engineers dates back to 1776 when the Continental Congress organized an army with a chief engineer and two assistants. Its mission is to provide quality, responsive engineering services including planning, designing, building and operating water resources and other civil works projects.

In the last 40 years, changes in values, politics and economics have resulted in major alterations in the Corps' water resources program. The passage of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986 signified a major shift in the nation's attitude towards water resources planning. This legislation attempted to shoulder more of the financial and management responsibilities on nonfederal interests. However, it has not worked out that way.

The Act authorized 377 new Corps of Engineers water projects for construction or study. Since then, many more projects have been authorized by subsequent WRDAs. It has been a growing concern that some of these projects are unnecessary and benefit only a small group. While a WRDA approves projects, studies and programs and authorizes appropriations,

it does not appropriate the funds. According to the Corps, the balance of funding needed to complete the budgeted projects currently in the Construction, General (CG) program has grown to an estimated \$21 billion in fiscal year 2002.

The new legislation is intended to allow the Corps to build good projects with large public benefits faster while ending federal involvement for projects that benefit narrow special interests. In addition, it would focus the Corps on its core missions of navigation, flood control and environmental restoration by eliminating other projects. It also would institute a system of independent peer review of large and controversial projects with the Corps' current planning process. President Bush advocated similar reforms in his budget proposal introduced in February.

Unfortunately, it seems as if Congress has used the Corps to spend on parochial projects with little benefits to taxpayers nationally. For example, 58 beach replacement projects were earmarked in last year's Energy & Water Development Appropriations bill. The Modernization and Improvement Act would cut the Federal cost-share on these projects from 65 percent to 35 percent. While the Act also would deauthorize projects whose primary purpose is municipal supply and wastewater treatment, hopefully this money would be put back into the State Revolving Funds or other funding options.

*WEM is looking for people to be part of our editorial advisory board. If you are interested in helping, contact me at [bswichtenberg@sgcmail.com](mailto:bswichtenberg@sgcmail.com) or 847-391-1008.*

*If you have not filled out your WEM Reader Survey that appeared in the March issue, please do so. Your participation is important to us.*

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