

Rahall secures deal for Kermit waste project

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall, D-WV, has been a busy man in Congress this week, announcing the successful fruition of his efforts toward getting three grant awards for Mingo County projects in housing, industry and wastewater treatment.

His latest announcement concerns a property acquisition agreement which has been reached between the town of Kermit and Norfolk Southern Corp., paving the way for construction of Kermit's much-needed new wastewater treatment plant to proceed.

“Over the past several weeks, I have had many conversations with Norfolk Southern in an effort to forge a compromise that would allow the town of Kermit's wastewater project to move forward,” said Rahall. “Norfolk Southern has acted as a true partner in this community by stepping up to the plate and helping the people of southern West Virginia in their efforts to improve infrastructure in the area.”

Kermit Mayor Johnny Linville said “Congressman Rahall has been a great help in this and many other projects in the area. I am happy we were all able to reach a fair agreement, which will greatly help the residents of Kermit.”

Under the agreement, the town of Kermit will purchase 1.7 acres of Norfolk Southern's land along U.S. Route 52 at Kermit and send the project to bid before the end of the year.

Once completed, the project will include waterline upgrades, a new booster pumping station, and a new wastewater treatment package plant. Funding for the \$2,231,200 project has been provided through a \$1.5 million Small Cities Block Grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection's State Revolving Loan Fund.

Earlier this week, Rahall announced that West Virginia Salmon and Trout, LLC, has been awarded \$75,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Program to develop the first inland salmon fishery in West Virginia (Mingo and Logan Counties).

He said West Virginia Salmon and Trout “is just one of the many ventures in which we are utilizing southern West Virginia's rich natural resources to rehabilitate former mine lands and expand our economy.”

That fishery is an inland aquaculture company that uses innovative water recirculating technology to raise sustainable and environmentally friendly salmon and trout at its

processing facility in Mingo County and production facility at Man in Logan County. The fishery is a subsidiary of Blue Ridge Aquaculture based in Marvinsville, Va.

Tracy Mitchell, director of business division for West Virginia Salmon and Trout, said the project will get started Oct. 1 with the signing of all paperwork in Beckley.

Rahall said the funding and start of the first inland salmon fishery in this state “will help bring fresh jobs, fresh visitors and fresh seafood to southern West Virginia.” He said with innovative ideas such as this “we can bridge the gap between the coal-centered economy of the past and a more diverse economy of the future that will provide jobs and protect our natural resources for years to come.”

Friday’s news releases from Rahall’s office also included announcement of a \$20,000 grant award to the Housing Authority of Mingo County for the repair and rehabilitation of owner-occupied housing in Mingo County.

The award in Housing Preservation funds by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Develop Program totaled \$162,000, the funding earmarked for southern West Virginia Housing authorities. The money is to be used to help repair and rehabilitate low-income and rural housing in communities across this state’s southern area.

Besides the Mingo allocation, the \$162,000 USDA funding includes:

– \$70,000 for the Safe Housing and Economic Development Inc. (SHED) for the repair and improvement of low-income housing in McDowell, Mercer and Wyoming Counties.

– A \$72,000 grant to Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS) for the repair and rehabilitation of low-income housing in rural coal-camp communities of Fayette County. This is the third straight year SALS has been awarded USDA Housing Preservation funding.

“I am always happy to help a family find or fix the place they call home,” said Rahall. “These grants will help some of southern West Virginia’s hardest working families make much-needed repairs and upgrades to keep their homes safe.”

(The USDA’s Housing Preservation Grant program provides funding to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for use in targeted housing repair or rehabilitation program.)

On Thursday, Rahall attended the dedication ceremony of the 9/11 Memorial at The Pentagon. He was joined by Huntington residents Dr. Ken and Sharon Ambrose, whose son, Dr. Paul Ambrose, was one of the 184 persons whose lives were lost in The Pentagon and on American Airlines Flight 77 during the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

“Over the last seven years, thousands of Americans, both in and out of government, have worked tirelessly to improve the security of our nation,” said Rahall.

“Much progress has been made, but much work remains to be done. My number-one duty as a member of Congress is to protect the people of West Virginia and the United States and to ensure that such a terrible tragedy never happens again.

“As we move forward, I will work hard to keep our homeland secure and to seek out and defeat terrorist organizations around the world,” said the congressman from West Virginia’s Third District.

Among Rahall’s other activities this week was his Tuesday vote to stop the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Mexican trucking program.

Rahall is vice chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and helped lead the House of Representatives in voting to immediately end the NAFTA pilot program that allows Mexican trucks to operate beyond commercial zones at the U.S.-Mexico border.

“The safety of our roadways must come first,” said Rahall. “We cannot have Mexican trucks disobeying our traffic and cargo standards and endangering the safety of American drivers. I am proud to have co-sponsored this bill, which helps protect the lives of the many West Virginians on the roads each day.”

A year ago (Sept. 6, 2007), despite Congressional objections and safety concerns, the U.S. Department of Transportation began a cross-border pilot program in compliance with NAFTA, allowing Mexican trucking companies to operate in the U.S. Prior to that, Mexican trucks were prohibited from operating beyond the 20-mile commercial zone around U.S.-Mexico border crossings.

HR 6630, co-sponsored by Rahall, would immediately terminate the NAFTA pilot program and prohibit the DOT from granting new authority for Mexican trucks to operate beyond the commercial zones on the border without express authorization by Congress.

Continuing his mission to seek funding for West Virginia’s transportation projects, Rahall helped lead final passage Thursday of H.R. 6532, the Highway Trust Fund Restoration Act, which would provide an immediate \$8.017 billion infusion of funds to address the oncoming shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund and continue critical highway projects.

Having passed both the House and Senate, the bill will now be sent to the President to be signed into law. “We sent the President a bill that will help protect West Virginia’s jobs and highways,” said Rahall.

“Without this bill, highway projects such as the I-73/74 Corridor, Route 10, the Coalfields Expressway, the New River Parkway, and the Shawnee Parkway, which I included in the 2005 Transportation Bill, could lose critical funding,” he stressed.

He said this new bill will provide \$8.017 billion to shore up a projected shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund for fiscal year 2009 and help to achieve the funding levels for highways and public transportation authorized by SAFETEA-LU in 2005.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, failing to enact this bill could lead to a devastating \$14 billion, or 34 percent, reduction in federal highway investment in fiscal year 2009.

West Virginia alone would stand to lose nearly \$120 million in highway funds and an estimated 4,154 transportation related jobs.