

June 20, 2001
(House Rules)

**H.R. 2217 - DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS BILL, FY 2002
(Reps. Young (R) Florida and Skeen (R) New Mexico)**

This Statement of Administration Policy provides the Administration's views on the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, FY 2002, as approved by the House Committee. Your consideration of the Administration's views would be appreciated.

The Administration appreciates the Committee's efforts to fund agencies and programs at the President's request, as detailed below. The Administration is committed to working with the Congress to enact all 13 appropriations bills in a timely manner and within the framework of the recently adopted budget resolution. The President believes that this level of funding will moderate the recent rapid growth in spending while funding important national priorities. In developing the FY 2002 Budget, he sought to make reductions in one-time spending, unjustified or duplicative programs, and programs that have completed their mission. The Administration urges the Congress to support the President's overall approach to the FY 2002 Budget.

The Administration would like to take this opportunity to share some concerns with the Committee version of the bill, as noted below.

Department of the Interior

The Administration commends the Committee for addressing most of the Administration's priorities for the Department of the Interior, including funding the requests for the National Park Service (NPS) deferred maintenance backlog, NPS Natural Resource Challenge, Bureau of Indian Affairs school construction, landowner incentive and stewardship grants, and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Federal land conservation activities.

Unfortunately, the bill does not fully fund LWCF by providing \$450 million for LWCF State grants. Instead of giving States the flexibility to determine how best to allocate funding, the bill redirects the request for LWCF State grants to various specialized conservation accounts. The Administration requests that the Committee reallocate funds to fully fund LWCF and allow State governments -- not the Federal Government -- to determine how best to address the priority conservation needs in their respective States.

The Administration applauds the Committee's efforts to limit the number of unrequested construction and land acquisition projects. Agencies can only meet performance goals, such as eliminating the current NPS backlog of deferred maintenance priorities, if Congress funds agency priorities. Therefore, the Administration urges the Committee to refocus funding for projects that do not address deferred maintenance and other priority needs, and to eliminate a provision that would delay management reforms of park concessions and partnerships.

Department of Energy (DOE)

The Administration appreciates that the Committee has fully funded the President's initiatives to create a new and innovative Clean Coal Power program and support the Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve. These funds will allow better use of an abundant domestic energy source in an environmentally sound way, and help assure families in the Northeast that home heating oil will be available next winter. While the Administration appreciates that the Committee has provided full funding for energy conservation programs that include weatherization and State energy grants, the Administration is concerned that the Committee failed to fully fund the President's request of \$273 million for the low-income Weatherization Assistance Program, a Presidential initiative. The Administration recognizes the value of increasing funding for State energy conservation programs, but believe the funds would be better spent on helping low-income families reduce their energy bills and improve their quality of life through the weatherization program. The Administration urges the Committee to fully fund the President's initiative.

While the Administration appreciates the Committee action to terminate some poor performing programs as recommended in the budget, the Administration urges the Committee to support additional program reforms suggested by the Administration. DOE and OMB have recently embarked on an intense effort to evaluate the performance and value of DOE's Research and Development (R&D) programs. The Administration would welcome the Congress' input and assistance in this important review because the results of the review will inform the FY 2003 Budget development process.

Department of Agriculture

The Administration appreciates the Committee's efforts in addressing Administration funding priorities for the Forest Service. The Committee fully funds the National Fire Plan, funds increased recreation opportunities to the public, and supports key restoration land treatments in the National Forest System. The Committee's action will enable the agency to provide hazardous fuels reductions in over 500,000 acres of mostly Federal lands, providing direct assistance to over 2,000 communities in the wildland urban interface. While the Administration applauds the Committee for limiting the number of unrequested construction and land acquisition projects, this approach was not followed in the Economic Action programs and the Forest Legacy program, in which earmarks total almost 50 percent of each program. The Administration urges the Committee to redistribute these funds to programs that competitively allocate resources.

Firefighting Transfer Authority

The Administration appreciates the Committee's interest in providing flexible transfer authority to the Secretary of Agriculture for the purposes of funding firefighting activities. However, the Administration strongly opposes new language included in the bill that could be read to allow the Secretary to use funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) for such purposes. This would be contrary to the purpose of CCC to provide assistance to farmers and would inappropriately authorize expansion of mandatory spending. We urge the House to modify the language to exclude the transfer of funds from the Department of Agriculture's corporations.

Pay Raise

The Administration is gratified that the Committee has supported the President's pay raise

proposal of 3.6 percent for Federal civilian employees. The Administration believes this proposal is both reasonable and responsible. While recruiting and retaining the skilled and dedicated Federal civilian work force necessary to provide high-quality services to the American public is very important, the Administration believes that civilian employees are already benefiting from several recent enhancements to their compensation package. The Administration does not believe that military pay and civilian pay raises should necessarily be automatically linked. The Administration will continue to review Federal pay policy annually, and evaluate military and civilian pay raise policies on the basis of the particular circumstances applicable to each (for example, recruiting and retention needs), consistent with prudent use of taxpayers' dollars. The additional cost of a 4.6 percent civilian pay raise is nearly \$900 million over what is currently included in the President's request, and would, if funded, divert critical resources from programs such as those funded in this bill.

Infringement on Executive Authority

The Administration objects to a number of provisions in the Committee bill that would require congressional approval before Executive Branch execution. The Administration will interpret these provisions to require only notification of Congress, since any other interpretation would contradict the Supreme Court ruling in INS v. Chadha.

[Ed. Note: Copied from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/legislative/sap/107-1/HR2217-r.html> and converted to PDF without change on August 14, 2006.]