

Regula supports labor-backed expansion

by Paul M. Krawzak

WASHINGTON - Rep. Ralph Regula joined area Democratic lawmakers, including Rep. Zack Space, in passing water and sewer related legislation this week that includes a controversial labor-backed provision.

Regula, R-Bethlehem Township, was among a minority of Republicans who on Friday voted for a union-backed measure that would require local governments to pay the prevailing local wage to workers engaged in wastewater treatment plant construction projects that receive federal funds.

The provision is part of a bill that would authorize \$14 billion over four years for a state-federal fund that offers low-interest loans for wastewater treatment construction and other pollution-abatement projects.

The House approved the legislation 303-108. The bill received the support of 224 Democrats but only 79 Republicans. Another 108 Republicans voted against it.

Space, D-Dover, voted for the bill, along with area Democratic Reps. Tim Ryan of Niles, Betty Sutton of Copley and Charlie Wilson of St. Clairsville.

Current law - the Davis-Bacon wage law - requires workers on federal construction projects to receive local prevailing wages and benefits.

In a statement after the vote, House Minority Leader John Boehner, R-West Chester, slammed the bill, which he said would increase the costs of wastewater projects by requiring payment of the prevailing wage.

"This bill would essentially shut small businesses out of government contract work by needlessly saddling them with millions in new administrative costs that only the largest of corporations can offer," he said.

No Democratic lawmaker voted against the bill, which had strong support from organized labor.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said in a statement the legislation would ensure that "workers who build these wastewater projects (receive) good and fair wages."

Regula was on his way back to the district after the vote and was unavailable for comment.

Regula, Space and other area lawmakers also voted for two other bills that won passage in the House earlier in the week. These other two bills received support from the majority of Republicans as well as all Democrats who voted.

One would authorize \$125 million for a pilot program to help local governments and organizations identify alternative water sources.

The other would authorize 1.7 billion over five years for grants to repair or replace aging sewer systems.

None of the bills has been passed in the Senate.

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