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WRDA 2020

Hannah Northey, an E&E News reporter analyzes the successes and issues mentioned in the new "Water Resources Development Act of 2020" in her article, "Congress to fast-track whittled-down infrastructure bill". In 2020, members of the house had to revote on a revised version of the water infrastructure bill. A revision in the bill was required because they had to make a compromise between the staffers of the Senate Environment and Public Works and the staffers of the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee. The House and Senate staffers were finding themselves at a crossroads because they were having trouble coming up with the funds for such an ambitious bill so the demands on it had to be reduced. A lot of the resources were allocated to the Army Corps of Engineers, also known as the ACE, for projects while other sectors were merely neglected.

The WRDA of 2020 heavily focused on the ACE and authorized them to construct 46 new projects and 27 feasibility studies for water resources development projects. They were also given consent to calculate the benefits of sea-level rise on specific projects and were allowed to study communities that were repeatedly devastated by floods. The director of water resources and coastal policy for the national wildlife federation said "this forward-thinking bill will better prepare the nation for extreme weather, elevating nature's ability to protect communities and helping to level the playing field for flooding solutions that incorporate natural systems, such as wetlands, dunes and floodplains". The WRDA of 2020 also prioritized environmental justice issues such as affordability in economically disadvantaged communities, minority communities, and rural communities. Environmental racism encompasses a lot of what environmental justice is about and many communities of color or lower class find trouble in obtaining clean water for

them to drink or wash themselves with. With the help of the WRDA of 2020, new solutions can be found in order to provide these communities with the water they need without them having to worry about it.

However, even though the WRDA of 2020 touched a lot of ongoing and current issues, it also neglected provisions in the bill surrounding drinking water, waste water, and stormwater because they directed most of their funds to the ACE. Congress was unable to provide new funding that was needed for public clean water utilities as well as COVID-19 relief from the ongoing pandemic. The National Association of Clean Water Agencies also known as the NACWA, estimated that almost \$17 billion of revenue to utilities was lost due to the pandemic. They are responsible for representing over 300 public wastewater and stormwater utilities but because of the pandemic, water usage has declined significantly. One major aspect that was neglected in the WRDA was the “America's water infrastructure act” which would have reauthorized the Clean Water State Revolving Fund program, the primary federal clean water funding tool that communities utilize to help meet their Clean Water Act obligations and infrastructure needs. The CEO of NACWA, Adam Krantz believes it "will be needed more than ever in the coming years". The WRDA also rejected EPA pilot programs that supported clean water technologies as well as federal grant programs which hindered many new projects from being started for finding new sources of clean water.

In the United States, the Army Corps of Engineers holds the main responsibility for water management. Throughout history, Congress gave them authority over navigational operations, flood control act, and clean water act. The political leaders who made the decisions on which projects to fund are made by those who have the most political clout, meaning a lot of the decisions made were biased and chosen based on what those leaders saw fit. However, during the

mid 1960's water resource planning shifted from putting an emphasis on economic development to municipal, industrial, and recreational purposes. The water lobby was forced to make concessions to environmental groups after projects started to impact scenic or preserved areas. Because of this, a lot of water resource planning was more considerate of the sustainable use of water.

During Reagan's term of presidency, he stressed cost sharing requirements on water projects and the state and local government started to realize that they would have to pay a larger share of the cost for many of the projects so they were hesitant to fund them. The WRDA was being negotiated because they didn't have or want to provide the funds for demands. This happened because there was a growing "clout" of urban political interests over those of agriculture. From a more local aspect, city leaders tend to avoid charging businesses for the real cost of water delivery so they don't stomp their economic growth. Some cities that share the same water district with other cities subsidize the water costs of other cities. market transfers are dependent on reallocating water supplies rather than coming up with new sources of water leading to the WRDA neglecting the EPA pilot programs that supported new clean water technologies.

Congress holds a lot of power over funds and can allocate their resources to whatever groups or sectors they please. Especially with the COVID-19 pandemic this has become an issue because they did not see the need to aid the Clean Water State Revolving Fund program which would have helped many communities with access to clean water. However, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee still believes that the WRDA "has again demonstrated its commitment to addressing the critical infrastructure needs of the nation, in a bipartisan manner, and shown that the WRDA still works." While the WRDA did address some

critical issues that the United States has dealing with water, it failed to acknowledge some major points such as COVID-19 relief which will most likely affect the economy as well as many communities in the future.

Works Cited

Northey, Hannah. "WATER POLICY: Congress to Fast-Track Whittled-down Infrastructure Bill." *WATER POLICY: Congress to Fast-Track Whittled-down Infrastructure Bill -- Monday, December 7, 2020*, www.eenews.net/stories/1063720021.