



NEWS from the T&I Committee
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
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Hon. James L. Oberstar (Minn.), Chairman

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Poll Shows Rural Americans Want Greater Protection for Water Resources and Environment

WASHINGTON—Today, Rep. James L. Oberstar (Minn.), Chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (Tex.), Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, reacted to a recent poll commissioned by Earthjustice, a non-profit environmental law firm, showing that rural voters are very concerned about pollution in America's waterways and water supplies. More than half of the nine hundred voters polled in three rural Congressional districts said they care deeply about protecting the environment and sources of safe drinking water.

"Americans have a better understanding that there is a strong nexus between environmental conditions and public health, such as contaminated water supplies," said Oberstar. "This poll confirms that rural Americans – regardless of their political allegiance -- worry about the environment and clean water sources, and they don't think the Federal government has done enough to keep our lakes, rivers and streams free from pollution."

Among the findings of the poll are that two-thirds of rural voters are very concerned about pollution of drinking water. One-third of poll respondents said they are concerned about drinking water straight from their tap at home.

"Although we have made great strides since the Clean Water Act was enacted in 1972 toward the goal of restoring and maintaining 'the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters,' we have not yet completed our task, because one-third of our waters still do not meet the 'fishable' and 'swimmable' standard," said Johnson. "Efforts to clean up America's waters have stalled -- even slipped -- under the stewardship of the Bush Administration. In the past several years, the Federal government has let down municipalities' efforts to protect watersheds, provide safe drinking water, and make recreational water sources fishable and swimmable."

"Our nation's clean water sources have been put further at risk by two Supreme Court decisions that have created confusion about the jurisdictional understanding of the Clean Water Act," said Oberstar. "As a result, there has been great uncertainty for Federal, state and

local governments, agencies, courts, communities and land owners regarding where Federal authority begins and ends under the Clean Water Act.”

By more than a two-to-one margin, rural voters in the poll support Clean Water Act protection for all bodies of water.

“This poll reaffirms the need for H.R. 2421, the Clean Water Restoration Act, which reestablishes jurisdictional standards used for three decades by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers,” said Oberstar. “Additionally, this poll shows that a majority of rural voters, including farmers, agree that ‘government has not gone far enough with laws to protect the environment and keep our water free from pollution’ – contrary to what opponents of the legislation have claimed.”

“The Earthjustice poll shows that rural Americans want the Federal government to protect and maintain our natural resources and preserve our safe drinking water supply,” Johnson concluded. “We are at a turning point in history, and our responsibility to this generation and our legacy to future generations is to advance the cause of protecting the most precious of natural resources – clean water.”

The poll was conducted in rural Congressional districts in Illinois, Ohio, and Tennessee.

The poll results can be found in their entirety at <http://www.earthjustice.org/library/background/voters-cupport-clean-water-protections.html>.

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