

Castle Legislation on Committee to Protect Delaware River Passes in Final Form -- June 27, 2006

Washington, D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today helped pass the Delaware River Protection Act, as part of the FY 2006 Coast Guard Authorization bill. The House version of the legislation passed in June 2005 and the Conference Report passed in its final form today, and it will now go to the President to be signed into law. The legislation would establish, from Castle's recommendation, a regional committee to address future oil spills and other issues affecting the River and Bay. The bill was authored by Representative Frank Lobiondo (R-NJ) in response to the November 26, 2004 Athos I oil spill.

"Today is a great day for the advancement of cleanup and protection of the Delaware River and Bay. We are lucky to have such an important environmental resource and significant commercial channel in our region, and we must do all we can to protect it," Castle said. "The Delaware River and Bay Oil Spill Advisory Committee will provide a much needed regional sounding board for issues concerning the Delaware River and Bay -- whether it be future oil spills, or environmental and industry concerns. Such collaboration will ensure the health of the River and Bay. I am glad the Senate and House could work together to make the Delaware River and Bay Oil Spill Advisory Committee and other crucial provisions of the legislation a reality."

Role of the Delaware River and Bay Oil Spill Advisory Committee:

- Establish 27-member committee comprised of appointed experts from diverse fields--from a representative of the Port of Wilmington to three members who represent environmental organizations active with respect to the Delaware River and Bay to two members who represent operators of oil refineries, among many others;
- This Committee will provide advice and recommendations on the prevention of and response to future oil spills on the Delaware River and Bay and will report to Congress within 18 months on the recommendations;
- Recommendations do not need to be unanimous; therefore, all sides can be presented.

Other Key Provisions of The Delaware River Protection Act:

- Increases the liability limits for parties deemed responsible for an oil spill to reflect inflation since 1990 and requires that such increases continue to be made at least every three years. The agreement sets the limits at the greater of \$3,000 per gross ton or \$22 million for single-hull vessels, the greater of \$1,900 per gross ton or \$16 million for double-hull tank vessels, and the greater of \$950 per gross ton or \$800,000 for other vessels.
- Requires the Coast Guard to report within 45 days of enactment on the extent that oil discharge cleanups may exceed these limits, the impact on the Oil Liability Trust Fund, and recommendations for further increases.

- Requires any person who has knowledge of an object that creates an obstruction in U.S. navigable waters to notify both the Coast Guard and the Army Corps.

- Requires the NOAA and the Coast Guard to create a program to evaluate environmental effects of submerged oil in the Delaware River and Bay region.

- Authorizes funding for the NOAA and the Coast Guard to develop technology and management methods to remove submerged oil from the Delaware River and other navigable waters.