

Congress overrides Bush water bill veto

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By Bruce Alpert
Washington bureau

WASHINGTON -- President Bush suffered the first veto override of his seven-year presidency Thursday as the Senate approved a \$23 billion water resources bill with almost \$7 billion for Louisiana coastal restoration and flood protection projects.

It was the first time in a decade that Congress has passed a bill over a presidential veto.

The Senate voted 79-14 for the measure, over objections from the White House that it is too expensive. The Senate had originally passed the bill in September 81-12. The action follows Tuesday's 361-54 vote in the House. Overrides require a two-thirds vote by both houses of Congress.

The bill only authorizes spending levels for about 900 projects. Congress still must approve individual appropriations to get the work done.

"I suggest that the president should not have vetoed this bill," said Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., who joined a large majority of Republicans in deserting the president.

Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., said he understands that Bush is "trying to hold the line on spending." But he said the Water Resources Development Act is crucial to coastal states like Mississippi. It authorizes vital projects, Lott said, but will require individual appropriations by Congress that will be subject to future budget restraints.

Sen. David Vitter, R-La., said that the legislation is essential to his state.

"Many people forget so much of the devastation in Greater New Orleans in particular immediately following Hurricane Katrina was not because of an act of God, it was man-made," Vitter said, alluding to the failure of federally build levees to perform as intended.

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La. said: "I don't know why the president chose this bill to try to resume the mantle of fiscal responsibility. But he chose the wrong bill."

President Bush had suggested that authorizing as many projects as included in the WRDA bill will make it more difficult to achieve needed financing for the highest priority projects, such as upgrading of hurricane protection for the New Orleans area.

The Congressional Budget Office pegs 100-year flood protection for the New Orleans area at over \$3 billion, and state officials expect the cost to be far higher. It also authorizes \$1.9 billion for coastal restoration projects in Louisiana and \$886 million for a 72-mile system of levees and floodwalls to shield Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes from Gulf storms.

In addition, it authorizes \$100 million for hurricane protection in Jean Lafitte and lower Jefferson Parish and \$85 million for a loan fund to help private facilities move as a result of the closure of the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet and \$75 million for relocation assistance for public facilities affected by the closure