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Kirk Amendment to Protect Great Lakes from Canadian Nuclear Waste Heads to Senate Floor

Appropriations Bill Provision Urges State Department to Oppose Storage of Toxic Nuclear Waste Near Great Lakes Until Environmental Review Completed

Follows Committee Passage Last Month of Kirk Legislation to Ban Sewage Dumping in Great Lakes

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) today announced the Senate Appropriations Committee approved his amendment to protect the Great Lakes from a Canadian plan to permanently store 7 million cubic feet of nuclear waste less than a mile from the Great Lakes until a review of potential long-term impacts is completed.

The Kirk amendment, which calls on the Department of State to request an International Joint Commission Review of Ontario Power Generation's proposal and to urge the government of Canada to postpone the plan until the review is complete, was included in the fiscal year 2016 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill, which passed the committee by a vote of 27 to 3.

"This dangerous plan to store 7 million cubic feet of nuclear waste less than a mile from the shores of the Great Lakes could cause irreparable damage to our nation's most precious natural resource and the source of drinking water for millions in Illinois," Senator Kirk said. "We are one step closer to saving the Great Lakes, the crown jewel of the Midwest, from being polluted by toxic nuclear waste."

Senator Kirk, the co-chair of the bipartisan Great Lakes Task Force, has led the charge in Congress to protect the Great Lakes from pollution and other environmental threats. Since 2011, Senator Kirk has repeatedly raised concerns about the Canadian proposal to store nuclear waste in the Great Lakes Basin, sending letters in 2011 and 2013 to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) warning against possible harmful impacts. Earlier this year, Senator Kirk was the lead Republican in introducing S.Res.134, a resolution expressing disapproval of the plan and calling on the President and Secretary of State to work with the Canadian government find a safe and responsible alternative. Senator Kirk also sent a letter to President Obama in May urging him to work with the Canadian government to postpone the plan until an environmental review is conducted and the long-term impacts are fully assessed by the U.S. government.

Last month, the Appropriations Committee passed Senator Kirk's bipartisan Great Lakes Water Protection Act, which would ban sewage dumping in the Great Lakes. An estimated 24 billion gallons of combined untreated sewage and storm water are dumped into the Great Lakes each year, threatening the ecosystem of the lakes and leading to hundreds of beach closures, damaging the Illinois economy and costing taxpayers \$2.4 million annually. The Great Lakes Water Protection Act bans sewage dumping into the Great Lakes by 2035, giving communities 20 years to make the necessary upgrades to their infrastructure before fines are increased from \$37,500 to \$100,000 a day per violation.

“This ban on Great Lakes sewage dumping is one of the most aggressive measures ever taken to protect our nation’s most precious ecosystem, which supplies 84 percent of the surface fresh water in North America,” Senator Kirk wrote in an op-ed in the Daily Southtown last week. “Lake Michigan is our state’s most precious natural resource, and we must work to keep it, and all of the Great Lakes, safe and clean for future generations.”

Also included in the fiscal year 2016 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill was robust funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) at \$300 million annually. Senator Kirk fought to include this funding for GLRI after the Administration cut \$50 million from the program in its FY 2016 budget request. GLRI addresses major ecological threats to the Great Lakes, such as invasive species, runoff, and toxic hotspots like Waukegan Harbor across the Great Lakes Basin.

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