

[From the Washington Times]

'BRIDGE TO NOWHERE' OK'D FOR EVERGLADES

(By Stephen Dinan)

A provision buried inside Congress' giant spending bill would overturn a federal court order, discard part of environmental law and reject an Indian tribe's plea, forcing the government to build a bridge in Everglades National Park that a federal judge declared "a complete waste of taxpayer dollars."

The project is being opposed by the Miccosukee tribe, and U.S. District Judge Ursula Ungaro called it an "environmental bridge to nowhere." She ordered the government in November to comply with federal environmental laws, which would further delay the long-controversial project.

But lawmakers inserted a provision in the 1,123-page omnibus spending bill that is pending in the Senate. It waives those laws and in sweeping language orders the Army Corps of Engineers to begin building the bridge "immediately and without further delay."

Those pushing for the bridge, which would elevate the Tamiami Trail roadway to allow water to flow freely into the Everglades, say Congress' urgency is justified.

"The project has been studied and delayed over and over again for 20 years. Meantime, one of the world's great treasures continues to die," said Dan McLaughlin, a spokesman for Sen. Bill Nelson, Florida Democrat. "The National Academy of Sciences, in a report to Congress, says the bridge is needed to allow water north of the road to flow south into the Everglades. Senator Nelson supports it. It's absolutely essential to restoring the 'Glades. No bridge—no water flow. No water—no Everglades."

But the Miccosukee, who went to court last year to stop the bridge, are crying foul, saying it's hypocritical of Congress to ignore its own environmental laws.

The tribe also said that overturning a court order smacks of the broken treaties and poor treatment Indians suffered in years past.

"You tell the tribe to follow the law, but when the tribe follows the law and wins, you throw them out of court. It's really immoral and unconscionable," said Dexter Lehtinen, an attorney for the tribe. His wife is Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Florida Republican who Mr. Lehtinen said recuses herself from these matters.

The \$212 million bridge is part of a complex and contentious decades-old plan to try to restore the free flow of water through the Everglades, the swamp that covers much of southern Florida and is considered critical to the state's ecosystem. Decades of development and road-building have ruined the usual water flows.

Plans to restore water flow have changed repeatedly, and parts have been caught up in litigation, including the proposal to build a one-mile-long bridge along the northern park boundary at the Tamiami Trail, or U.S. Highway 41, which backers say would help the free flow.

The Miccosukee trace their time in the Everglades back to the 1700s when they moved to avoid encroaching upon European settlers farther north, in what is now Georgia, Alabama and northern Florida. They gained U.S. government recognition in 1962 and have both official reservation land and other land in perpetual lease.

Rather than the bridge, the tribe wants the government to instead clean out culverts and build swells that the Miccosukee say better and more cheaply restore water flow.

"The judge found that the likelihood is that people in Miami-Dade County are going to be flooded, there's not going to be any benefit to Everglades National Park, and

Miccosukee land is going to be further damaged," said Terry Rice, owner of an environmental services company and a former head of the Army Corps of Engineers district that includes the Everglades, who served as a witness for the tribe in court.

"Why do you say you have to build a project and you're not going to abide by any laws unless you can't abide by the laws?" Mr. Rice said.

The judge apparently agreed.

In issuing her preliminary injunction against the bridge, she said it won't begin to help water flow until the corps takes other steps, which are still in the planning stages. Given that, the judge said, rushing to build the project amounts to "no more than construction of an 'environmental bridge to nowhere' that accomplishes (and harms) nothing but which would be a complete waste of taxpayer dollars."

Backers acknowledged that tacking this sort of provision onto a spending bill was unusual, but said the bridge has widespread support, and only the tribe—and now the federal judge—objected.

Still, it could not be learned Monday who approved the insertion of the provision that forces the bridge to be built into the \$410 billion spending bill making its way through Congress.

The Miccosukee, in an ad last week, blamed House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid for the measure. The tribe called it "a lamentable blast from the past in American history."

But both leaders' offices said they weren't responsible.

"We had nothing to do with this," said Jim Manley, a spokesman for Mr. Reid, Nevada Democrat.

"This language was included at the request of the Bush administration and has bipartisan support. Neither the speaker nor her office played a role in its inclusion," said Drew Hammill, a spokesman for Mrs. Pelosi, California Democrat.

The Army Corps of Engineers also said it wasn't the source.

"To our knowledge the corps did not promote or draft this language," said spokeswoman Lt. Col Elizabeth Robbins.

The Interior Department did not return messages for comment.

Spokesmen for Sen. Dianne Feinstein, California Democrat, and Rep. Norm Dicks, Washington Democrat, the chairmen of the Senate and House subcommittees that wrote the parts of the bill funding the Interior Department, didn't have a comment Monday night.

A spokeswoman said Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, a Florida Republican whose district could be affected, was unavailable, while a spokeswoman for Sen. Mel Martinez, Florida Republican, said the senator did not request the provision, but she said she couldn't say whether he supported it.

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a Florida Democrat whose district is also affected, does support moving forward, said spokesman Jonathan Beeton.

"The congresswoman supports this project because it is the essential next step in Everglades restoration," Mr. Beeton said. "This view is supported by the National Academy of Sciences. At the same time, she understands the concerns and the deep commitment of the Miccosukee Tribe to the restoration of the Everglades."

Several Democrats pointed to the Bush administration's support for the provision. But that came in his fiscal 2009 budget, submitted nine months before the judge ruled that the environmental laws hadn't been followed.

THANKING DEBORAH PRICE FOR
HER SERVICE TO THE HOUSE

HON. ROBERT A. BRADY

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, on the occasion of her retirement at the end of February 2009, I rise to thank Ms. Deborah Price for her 25 years of outstanding service to the United States House of Representatives.

Deborah began her career with the House on September 19, 1984, and served in positions within the Office of Finance of the Chief Administrative Officer. As a Team Lead within the Office of Financial Counseling, she provided financial assistance and guidance to all Member and Committee offices including monitoring and projecting available fund balances and ensuring expenditures comply with both House and Committee rules and regulations.

Deborah has provided financial guidance to every entity of the House, assuring that House staff and vendors are paid accurately. Her passionate customer service and tireless commitment to the countless House staff members who have worked with her will be deeply missed.

On behalf of the entire House community, we extend congratulations to Deborah for her many years of dedication and contributions to the financial management of the House. We wish Deborah many wonderful years enjoying her retirement.

A PROCLAMATION HONORING THE
187TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
QUINN CHAPEL AFRICAN METH-
ODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

HON. ZACHARY T. SPACE

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

Mr. SPACE. Madam Speaker:

Whereas, the Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1821 and is celebrating its 187th anniversary in Chillicothe, Ohio; and

Whereas, the congregation of Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church can trace their roots to the first Methodist church congregation in Chillicothe and can boast to be among the first African Methodist Episcopal churches in the state, and

Whereas, the church was founded to extend equal rights and privileges of worship to African congregants at a time when such congregants were not afforded the same considerations as their white brethren and has continued to seek equality and brotherhood that transcends race. Congregants from the Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church played integral roles in the Underground Railroad and other abolitionist causes throughout the 19th century; now, therefore, be it

Resolved that along with the residents of the 18th Congressional District, I commend the Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church for nearly two centuries of dedication and service to the Chillicothe community and their efforts to preach equality and faith among all races and religions throughout the years.