



Thoughts From . . .
CAPITOL HILL



**By Congressmen Mike Ross and
Rodney Alexander**

Congressmen share common ground on Ouachita/Black project

WASHINGTON--As Republicans and Democrats continue to debate issues on a daily basis, one issue on which we both agree--in a true bipartisan fashion--is that our nation should invest more federal dollars into infrastructure projects.

Since we both were elected to Congress, we have witnessed that an investment in transportation funding almost always reaps dividends for local economies.

Congressional studies point out that every dollar spent on infrastructure yields a three dollar return and for every billion spent on infrastructure funding, nearly 50,000 jobs are created.

Infrastructure funding encompasses roads, runways (for airplanes), rail and water. However, water infrastructure has, in our opinion, the potential to greatly impact the economies in south Arkansas and north Louisiana.

For nearly four years, we've worked together to secure earmarks in the appropriations process for the Ouachita/Black River.

According to the Vicksburg Corps of Engineers, the Ouachita River originates in Polk County, Arkansas and meanders over 500 miles to Jonesville, Louisiana, where it meets the Tensas and Little Rivers forming the Black River.

There are numerous towns and cities that are located near the Ouachita's banks, and there is unlimited potential to increase the number of goods and products that are currently shipped daily on this navigable waterway.

But years of neglecting the proper maintenance required to address the needs of this project has caused great concern for businesses that rely heavily on waterway shipping on the Ouachita/Black Rivers.

That is why we have both worked hard to bring home the needed funding to improve navigation on this vital waterway.

According to the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA), three decades of neglect contributed to lock failure.

On top of Mother Nature's way of taking advantage of mankind's neglect, President Bush's FY 2005 budget cut of Operation and Maintenance funding in the Energy and Water Appropriation's Bill from \$10 million to \$2 million for the Ouachita/Black project, didn't help matters.

To us, and to the businesses that rely on this waterway, this budget cut was unacceptable.

Both of us fought to restore this funding and made it our priority again to increase funding in FY 07. We did.

Last year (FY 06), we earmarked \$13.9 million and topped it off with over \$15 million-- the largest in the project's history-- in this year's (FY 07) appropriations process.

We are confident that our Senate delegation (Arkansas and Louisiana) can preserve this funding in the final conference report.

We are sure that businesses such as Cross Oil in Arkansas and Sunshine Oil and Storage in Louisiana are breathing a sigh of relief upon hearing this good news from Capitol Hill.

Hopefully, we can continue to secure funding for the Ouachita/Black project in the upcoming fiscal years.

As members of opposite political parties, there are issues on which we will differ.

But one issue that we both agree upon is how beneficial federal infrastructure funding is to local economies. The best example of this is the Ouachita/Black project.

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