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Land-Locked Texas Congressman Tacked On Amendment Upending National Ocean Policy

BY MICHAEL CONATHAN - GUEST CONTRIBUTOR POSTED ON OCTOBER 24, 2013 AT 4:31 PM



For the third time in the past year, Representative Bill Flores (R-TX) has succeeded in getting an amendment passed in the House that would obstruct implementation of the National Ocean Policy. Yesterday afternoon, the House voted 225-193 to adopt Rep. Flores's proposal as part of the bipartisan Water Resources Reform and Development Act.

The WRRDA bill passed the House chamber and now must be reconciled with the [Senate version](#).

Flores had previously attached similar restrictions to the [Sandy Disaster Relief](#) funding bill and the [Energy and Water](#) appropriations bill, but neither provision survived in the Senate. And supporters of the National Ocean Policy appear to be gaining ground: a [May 2012 vote](#) on a similar amendment garnered 247 ayes to just 174 nays, meaning this time around Flores lost 22 yes votes while still holding a slim majority.

While the WRRDA bill will facilitate investments in water and navigational infrastructure, if enacted by the Senate, the Flores amendment would prohibit collaboration and participation of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers in any activities that contribute to the mission and goals of the National Ocean Policy. The Corps is a key player in ocean activities, particularly when it comes to ensuring safety of navigation and construction of permanent structures in the marine environment. The amendment also calls for duplicative reporting requirements on Corps activities.

Coastal economies contribute [\\$6.6 trillion](#) to US GDP, benefiting all US communities, including land-locked districts like Flores's. As climate change and acidification threaten ocean health, and coastal populations continue to swell, the need for a coordinated policy to manage our use of these resources has never been greater. Efforts to restrict the implementation of the National Ocean Policy needlessly threaten our coastal economies and environments.

Development of a [National Ocean Policy](#) began under President Bush, and was the direct result of a [2004 report](#) by a bipartisan group of 16 commissioners he appointed following Congressional passage of the 2000 Oceans Act. President Obama established the policy by Executive Order number 13547 in 2010. Its goal is to help agencies, states, local governments, tribes, and partners work together to better manage and protect our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. It creates no new regulations, but simply provides 27 federal agencies a forum in which they can work together to eliminate redundancies and inefficiencies. Such reductions in duplicative government spending have been resoundingly supported by the GOP on numerous other fronts.

One of the policy's key principles is encouraging [regional development](#) and implementation of comprehensive ocean planning, a practice akin to land use planning that allows coordination and balance among new and emerging uses of ocean space. As competition for access to ocean space increases among traditional and modern industries including offshore energy development, commercial and recreational fishing,

shipping, sand and gravel mining, and offshore cables and infrastructure, our ocean space is becoming increasingly crowded. It only makes sense to ensure we're managing it in a manner that best reflects both regional and national priorities.

Furthermore, counter to claims by Rep. Flores and his allies that the policy represents a top-down imposition of federal will on state priorities, it is actually a collaborative effort of federal agencies with state and local partners, with no restrictions or requirements regarding whether or how a state or region chooses to participate. It simply provides a framework and a forum for regions that wish to collaborate and prioritize what efforts are most important to them. For example, in the Mid-Atlantic region initiatives could focus on the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy and the impacts of climate change on coastal communities.

Several regions, including the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and Pacific coast have already chosen to create regional planning bodies and are eager to take advantage of the principles outlined in the policy. Other regions have taken a wait-and-see approach, but in no case is the federal government forcing ocean planning efforts on unwilling regions.

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