

April 24, 2009: Weekly Washington Update

Congress is back in Washington this week and I'm continuing to keep my ear to the ground and advance issues important to both the First Congressional District and the Commonwealth as a whole. We received some great news in that the blue crab population is starting to rebound in the Chesapeake and the Virginia Indian tribal recognition bill has cleared another hurdle on its way to passage.

This time last year, I joined with my colleagues in Washington and Richmond to sound the alarm concerning the dire situation facing the blue crab fishery in the Chesapeake Bay. I encouraged and supported Governor Kaine's petition for a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration declaration of a fishery disaster for Chesapeake Bay blue crabs. Through our efforts, Congress provided \$20 million in assistance to restore the fishery and provide assistance to watermen. I am cautiously optimistic to hear that the blue crab population in the Chesapeake Bay is coming back. We need to ensure the health of the blue crab population, while at the same time keeping in mind that the effects the harvest restrictions have on our watermen.

In addition, any long-term recovery of the blue crab ultimately depends on the water quality of the Bay, and that is why I have introduced the Chesapeake Bay Accountability and Recovery Act. This bill would enhance the coordination, flexibility, and efficiency of restoration efforts; and it would enact the same management and budgeting tools that are key to successful complex environmental restoration projects such as the Great Lakes, the California Delta Region, and the Florida Everglades. By improving the water quality of the Bay, we will help not only the blue crab population, but also oyster populations and other resources vital to Virginia's environment, culture, history, and economy. I will continue to work with federal agencies and the Commonwealth of Virginia to ensure a healthy Chesapeake Bay.

On Wednesday, I joined all other members of the House Committee on Natural Resources in sending H.R. 1385, the Thomasina E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act of 2009, to the full House of Representatives for a final vote. The bill would extend federal recognition to the Chickahominy Indian Tribe, the Chickahominy Indian Tribe-Eastern Division, the Upper Mattaponi Tribe, the Rappahannock Tribe, Inc., the Monacan Indian Nation, and the Nansemond Indian Tribe, which have sought federal recognition through legislation for years.

I am pleased that this important effort to federally recognize Virginia Indian tribes will soon make its way to the floor of the House for final passage. It is my hope that it will enjoy the same unanimous support of the House as the bill did in the 110th Congress. The First Congressional District includes the tribal seats of the Upper Mattaponi in King William County and the Rappahannock Tribe in King and Queen County. These Virginia Indian tribes are important culturally and historically to the Commonwealth. It is high time they receive the same recognition afforded to other tribes across the nation. Although this week has been busy, I am glad to report these developments and look forward to continuing to work on behalf of you and the Commonwealth in our Nation's Capital.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.