

REP. KEITH ROTHFUS

Rehab our inland waterways

They are vital to the economy of Pennsylvania

Strengthening our inland waterway transportation system would make our nation more competitive in the global marketplace, grow our economy and create jobs.

Western Pennsylvania is fortunate to have so many beautiful rivers. Rivers such as the Allegheny, Ohio and Conemaugh crisscross Pennsylvania's 12th congressional district, which I

Drive a car? There is a good chance that the fuel at your local gas station arrived there by way of our nation's inland waterways.

be kept in good repair so that commerce can continue to flow. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

be kept in good repair so that commerce can continue to flow. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains and operates inland waterways and ports, but the process to improve them has been tied up in red tape. Feasibility studies that used to take three to five years can now take upwards of 10. This needlessly delays repair projects and prevents new ones from getting started.

Use electricity? Forty percent of our electricity in Pennsylvania comes from coal. If you take Route 65 from Beaver to Ambridge or Pittsburgh, you might notice all of the barges out on the Ohio River. A lot of the coal that powers our communities is transported by barge on our inland waterways.

Such concern for smooth operations at the Corps of Engineers is touching, considering Rothfus recently championed a government shutdown that put the Corps in limbo. While day-to-day operations at local dams continued, allowing for ongoing river navigation, the agency was forced to defer routine maintenance on facilities — a fact that worried Corps officials. The region's aging locks and dams "require that daily care to keep them functioning properly," a Corps spokesman told the *Post-Gazette* days into the shutdown.

projects by limiting feasibility studies to three years, streamlining environmental reviews, eliminating duplicative analyses and expediting the permitting process. It would establish a more transparent process, with greater congressional oversight to review and prioritize water infrastructure projects.

Yes, we are working with tight budgets in Washington, D.C.

The federal government should also be a good steward of hard-earned taxpayer dollars. WRRDA would promote fiscal responsibility by shifting billions in funding for old and inactive projects to new projects and by sunseting new projects after seven years if construction has not begun. In addition, it would require the Army Corps to sell properties that it does not require to fulfill its mission.

These reforms and others included in the WRRDA would help the federal government more efficiently and effectively maintain and improve our inland waterway transportation system. Doing so would help our economy grow and create jobs.

U.S. Rep Bill Shuster, a Pennsylvania Republican, emboldened by the bipartisan success of his bill, has already announced plans to reauthorize the measure in two years. But according to Politico, Democrats doubt Tea Party Republicans have truly changed: "There is nothing in the DNA of this Congress that says we can do another [bill] in two years," it quoted a Florida Democrat saying.

"Streamlining environmental reviews" is always popular among Republicans. While WRRDA authorized funding for some badly needed environmental projects, like an effort to restore Florida's Everglades, the National Wildlife Federation has blasted the bill. Speeding up environment studies, it said, "will result in taxpayers footing the bill for projects that cause entirely avoidable harm to our nation's waters."

Ironically, WRRDA is opposed by many Tea Party groups — including FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity — that Rothfus ordinarily kowtows to. Those groups charge that the bill doesn't have strict enough spending standards, and includes an additional \$1.5 billion for the "Kentucky Kickback," a lock-and-dam project that, many critics charge, is intended to benefit the re-election chances of Republican Senate Leader Mitch McConnell. Why were Republicans suddenly willing to cast off these Tea Party groups? As the website Politico surmised, the GOP "has been taking a thrashing in the polls" due to the shutdown ... and most of the spending authorized by WRRDA benefits districts represented by Republicans.



Most political observers think Rothfus' re-election prospects are on solid ground. But in a poll released by Democrats last month, voters divided evenly on whether Rothfus deserved to be re-elected, with 39 percent saying they weren't sure.

Rothfus' hardline stance in favor of a government shutdown last month probably won't help, and his rivals have been turning up the heat, noting his vote against government aid for victims of Superstorm Sandy early this year. John Stiles, a moderate Republican challenger, recently suggested that if

Johnstown suffered another historic flood, Rothfus "would let [it] drown on a matter of principle." Reason enough to trumpet a water-control bill!

Did someone say "coal"? The Center for Responsive Politics lists the mining industry as

Rothfus' chief source of support, with \$31,700 so far in support this election cycle, including money from Conso and the National Mining Association. Just days before this op-ed was published, in fact, Rothfus blasted the Obama Administration for limiting U.S. financial support for building coal plants in other countries. Rothfus' willingness to support dam projects at home is less impressive, perhaps, if you know he also wants to use tax dollars to build power plants overseas.