

Each of the many individuals and organizations concerned with the future of the Chesapeake Bay are all too aware of the serious environmental challenges we face in restoring this magnificent estuary. Over the past two decades, federal, state, and local partners have worked together to produce modest restoration gains, but stronger actions must be taken to reduce the region's nutrient and sediment loads to the Bay watershed.

Water quality remains the largest challenge we face to improve and restore the watershed. According to a report released this month by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Chesapeake Bay ranks among the most polluted estuaries in the nation, and conditions are expected to worsen as the area's population grows.

Each year, hundreds of millions of pounds of nutrients and sediments wash from farm fields, development projects and streets, and wastewater treatment plants into the Bay. Sediment buries oyster beds, destroys Bay grasses and excess nitrogen and phosphorus spur the growth of unwanted algae and other microorganisms that deplete the Bay's oxygen, cloud the water, and destroy other living resources.

Further frustrating our efforts are the effects of global warming. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation released their own findings showing that climate change has already begun to alter the Chesapeake Bay, warming and raising its waters in a way that could disturb delicate ecosystems and endanger low-lying

islands.

Under the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, the Bay State governors and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) committed to take measures to remove the Bay from the EPA's list of impaired waters under the Clean Water Act. The Bay Program partnership has given us the knowledge and identified some of the tools that are necessary to remove the Bay from this list. The states' Tributary Strategies have also given us a geographic template to help us focus our resources and actions. In order to make these necessary improvements, we must be able to provide adequate resources and target them strategically.

Every year there is a strong regional effort to target and increase funds and programs to help restore the Bay. This year is no exception. In the past few months, the House has passed more than \$37 million in project funding to invest in restoring the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

This is on top of increases we have approved for key national programs that provide critical support to the restoration effort, including the EPA's Small Watershed Grants Program and the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund, which is the single largest source of funding for pollution reduction upgrades to our nation's municipally owned wastewater plants.

Recognizing that agriculture also plays an integral role in the cultural and economic landscape of the Bay region, the House last month approved a 2007 farm bill that includes as much as \$212.5 million for conservation programs and expanded new initiatives to help producers protect and enhance the Chesapeake Bay and our natural resources.

The initiative includes \$150 million for targeted nutrient reduction and sediment control in the rivers of the watershed to improve water quality, and restore and enhance wildlife, beginning with the Susquehanna, Patuxent, Shenandoah, and Potomac Rivers. An additional \$25 million will be used for a pilot program to help producers in the watershed find cost effective strategies to address the resource needs of their farms, while helping to meet key environmental goals.

In considering future restoration strategies, we should further allow science and cooperative decision-making to target resources, and we need to encourage innovation and collaboration, especially at the local level. Without the direct involvement of farmers and local citizens in finding the solutions to these pressing environmental problems, we can expect little real progress toward the ambitious clean up goals that we need to achieve for the Bay, ourselves, and future generations.

As Congress continues to work on fiscal year 2008 priorities, I will continue to fight to advocate for a continued investment in federal programs which seek to help clean the Chesapeake Bay, including those that improve water quality overall and promote successful conservation practices.