

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**May 3, 1999**

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LAST WEEK -

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ON HOLD - While both House and Senate Conferees have been named to negotiate provisions of H.R. 1141, the timeframe for action on the bill is uncertain. Members of both chambers have begun development of separate legislation making supplemental appropriations to cover costs incurred by the military for intervention in Kosovo. Several members have expressed interest in merging the Defense supplemental with H.R. 1141 in the near future. Next week the Senate will consider the supplemental bill associated with Kosovo. The Senate version of H.R. 1141 contains \$100 million for the NRCS Emergency Watershed Program as well as \$28 million to fund technical assistance costs associated with the Conservation Reserve Program. Throughout the week, several members took to the floor to encourage expedited movement on the supplemental bill to provide needed assistance to agriculture.

AGING DAMS ISSUE BRIEFING - On Monday, April 26, Larry Caldwell, NRCS State Engineer in Oklahoma and Bruce Julian, NRCS Watersheds and Wetlands Division provided a briefing for the Senate Agriculture Committee about the aging watershed infrastructure. Topics discussed in the briefing included trends for P.L. 566 and P.L. 534 over the past five decades; the common problems associated with aging dams; and possible solutions. A four minute video on dam safety was presented as well as a series of slides explaining the importance of rehabilitating old dams, and maintaining the existing infrastructure. Senate staff were interested in the NRCS rapid assessment and reviewed maps and charts displaying data on the various states. Staff members asked about the cost estimates for addressing rehabilitation needs and also made inquiries about legal liability if dams fail.

HOUSE PASSES H.R. 1480 - The bill (Sponsored by Shuster, R-PA) would provide for conservation and development of water and related resources and authorize the Corp of Engineers to construct projects for improvements to rivers and harbors. Last week the Senate gave voice vote approval to a companion bill (S.507). Rep. Stenholm, D-TX, voiced concern about the authorization being for the Corps instead of NRCS. He stated "This situation is indicative of the lack of resources and support that are currently being provided to agriculture. Funding for the NRCS Small Watershed Program is no greater today, than it was in the 1950's. And the program has been virtually cut in half in the last five years."

