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## *House of Representatives*

# MUCH-NEEDED MONEY FOR NEW RIVER CLEAN-UP

**HON. BOB FILNER**  
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MR. FILNER:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the fiscal year 2004 energy and water appropriations conference report, which funds several projects of great interest to my constituents in Southern California.

The New River has been described as the “world's most polluted river.” The river flows from Mexico, north across the U.S. border, and through my district in Imperial County, California. Due to grossly inadequate sewage treatment and solid waste facilities in Mexico, raw sewage, industrial waste, and garbage are constantly released into the New River.

The New River is extremely polluted, foamy, and foul-smelling. The river significantly violates water quality standards, and plants and animals cannot survive in much of it. The New River continues to threaten the health of residents of my district and of

undocumented immigrants who use the waterway to cross the international border.

A coalition of citizen groups and government agencies in my district, including the Calexico New River Committee, has developed a feasible plan that will significantly improve the quality of water flowing through the community. The project involves building wastewater infrastructure to improve water quality in the vicinity of the city of Calexico on the southern portion of the New River in Imperial County by installing project headworks and encasing the New River, and constructing a disinfecting facility and wastewater polishing system as the river emerges from its encasement.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, which provides funding for the Nation's energy and water-related projects, would continue environmental restoration efforts on the New River. This is an extremely important first step in the process of

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enhancing the water quality of the southern portion of the New River, enriching life in the community, and making a healthier home for fish and wildlife.

Better quality water flowing along the New River would also mean improved water quality in the Salton Sea. The Salton Sea is the largest inland water body in California, and one of the largest salt lakes in the world. The Salton Sea is an important habitat for Federal and State listed endangered species, as well as other migrating and resident bird species, a reservoir for agricultural drainage, a center for recreation, and a wetland ecosystem.

But it is quickly becoming too saline to continue supporting wildlife, and a recent rural-to-urban water transfer may shrink the shoreline. This bill would provide funding for the Salton Sea Research project for efforts to continue study of the alternatives for restoration of the Sea.

Water that eventually drains into the Salton Sea comes from the Colorado River, and is delivered to farmers and residents in my community by the All American Canal. This bill provides funding to construct small regulating

reservoirs on the canal, which will vastly improve operating efficiencies. The reservoirs would provide storage for water that is unavoidably delivered from the lower Colorado River in excess of what is immediately needed by users, thereby improving water conservation efforts.

Finally, water in the Colorado River is threatened by a uranium mine tailings pile sitting only 700 feet from the River near Moab, Utah. The tailings, which sit in an unlined pond and seep into the ground water, are radioactive and contain high concentrations of toxic metals left by the leaching process used to separate uranium from ore. The tailings are leaking radioactive material into the Colorado River at levels 1,300 times above the allowed limit. This bill provides funding to accelerate remediation of this site, and would ensure that residents of my community, other Colorado River water users, and the environment receive the long-term protection so desperately needed.

For the sake of my constituents at the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as residents of the West, I urge my colleagues to support the conference report.