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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Dear Friend:

I was greatly disappointed that President Eisenhower vetoed, for the second time, the Lake Michigan Water Diversion Bill. Because of your interest in this measure, I want to report to you briefly on our efforts to secure its approval in Congress and our prospects for the future.

I felt that this bill was clearly needed for health, sanitary, navigation and fishing purposes for the people of Illinois, and I was glad to lead the successful fight for it in the Senate.

The bill would have provided for additional withdrawal of 1,000 cubic feet of water per second from Lake Michigan into the Illinois Waterway for a three-year trial period under the supervision of the Secretary of the Army. The Secretary of the Army during this time would have tested the effects of the diversion on: (1) commerce and navigation; (2) the Illinois Waterways; and (3) the water level of Lake Michigan. Full safeguards were provided against flooding downstream Illinois communities.

Many others also worked hard to secure the bill's passage in Congress. Especially deserving of appreciation were the Chicago delegation in the House led by Congressman Tom O'Brien, Mayor Richard J. Daley, the Sanitary District Trustees and business leaders, who gave freely of their time to testify for the bill and to try to persuade the President to sign it. An effort to send the bill back to Committee in the House was overwhelmingly defeated by a vote of 316 - 74.

Debate on the bill in the Senate was very heated. The final vote was 43 to 33. On this vote you may be interested to note that 40 Democrats voted 37 to 3 for the bill, and 36 Republicans voted 30 to 6 against it. On the basis of this vote, I think it is clear that the Democrats were concerned to meet the human needs of Illinois citizens, whereas most of the Republicans heeded the grossly exaggerated claims of the Eastern power combines about the loss of kilowatts at Niagara and the thoroughly disproved suggestions of the State Department about the effects of this diversion on Canada.

The answers to the President's veto memorandum are clear.

The testimony before the Senate Committee clearly proved that the added diversion will only lower the lake levels by about one-half inch, and that only after a number of years. It would, therefore, have little or no effect on lake navigation. The record also shows that Lake Michigan has never been regarded as an international water, since it lies wholly within the United States. It also shows that Canada acted in a unilateral fashion in beginning the diversion of five to six thousand cubic feet per second into Lake Superior, and that it can offset any loss of power at Niagara and the St. Lawrence by diverting an additional amount from Hudson Bay into Lake Superior.