

**SHORELINES – July**  
**As presented to the *Island Review* magazine.**

**Interview with a Legislative Director**

Although you may have never heard or met him, Joshua Bowlen is one of our greatest beach and waterway assets on Capitol Hill. As legislative director for Congressman Walter B. Jones, Josh ensures that the Congressman is up to speed with the ever changing world of water resources. Congressman Jones has a huge District to represent with interests and responsibilities to tend to that are as varied as the N.C. coastal plain itself. Josh and Congressman Jones work closely on shore protection and waterway dredging issues and keep a close eye on appropriations and legislation affecting the 3rd Congressional District of N.C. Josh was raised in Southern California and attended the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) before coming across the country to N.C. to receive his masters in public policy from Duke University. He worked for the chairman of the Senate's Energy & Natural Resources Committee, Frank Murkowski, until the former Senator became governor of Alaska. Josh and his family wanted to return to North Carolina, and fortunately began working for Congressman Jones. He lives in Washington, D.C. for the most part but spends a considerable amount of time in the 3rd District of N.C. He is keenly aware of the Federal funding problems facing our beaches and waterways, and the potential impacts felt over the past several years. We spoke to Josh last month in detail about this very important topic.

**Rudi (R):** - *Josh, as you know, we can't go a week without the Federal funding issue regarding beach nourishment and shallow draft waterways grabbing the headlines. What changes have you experienced in the past few years, and is the situation as dire as it is portrayed?*

**Josh (J):** - There has been a steady decline in funding for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Projects over the past several years, especially concerning beach nourishment and shallow draft waterway dredging. At the end of the day, it appears that the Administration wants to push this off the list of Federal responsibilities and it's a constant fight on the Congressional level to push this back on the front burner and make these projects a national priority. One way we can do this is through the appropriation process. This has been a top priority for Congressman Jones in the past few years. Restoring funding that is not in President's budget request is extremely difficult and the Congressman works with other members of the State's delegation and two Senators every year for these important appropriations. This year, the Congressman worked closely with fellow Congressman Mike McIntyre (7th District) and the Corps to transfer unexpended funds to Bogue and New River Inlets, in addition to 3 inlets south of Onslow County. But there is no question that the Federal funding situation is dire.

**R:** - *With that in mind, and we hate to ask for you to look into a crystal ball, but where do you see all of this heading. Is this a blip on the appropriation radar screen or something permanent we need to be thinking about?*

**J:** - We see very little light at the end of the tunnel. Over the past few years, Congressman Jones has spoken to the Administration prior to the release of their budget about the importance of beach and waterway projects. If anything, the situation has gotten worse, and Congressman Jones is not the only Representative that has been having these conversations with the Administration. I can't re-emphasize enough how much the President's budget drives the appropriation process. If a project or mission is not in the Administration's budget, then it is exceedingly difficult for Congress to add the funding at a later date.

**R:** - *Then what do you think might be the appropriate State and Local role if this scenario keeps unfolding?*

**SHORELINES – July**  
**As presented to the *Island Review* magazine.**

**J:** - From the Congressman's perspective, he believes that the Federal government has made commitments to local communities, and he's fighting to make sure these commitments are kept. But if the Federal Government continues to back off these commitments, then some other entity will have to maintain beaches and waterways or else it won't get done. Congressman Jones is not ready to say what the proper role of State, local communities, and private entities should be, but he does think there needs to be a dialogue among these stakeholders about what to do about this situation long term.

**R:** - *The deep draft harbor projects like those at the Ports of Morehead City, Wilmington, Oakland, Baltimore, etc. seem to be sheltered from the cuts in dredging and beach nourishment. Are the infrastructure and job investments at our Ports simply too great to be ignored?*

**J:** - Corps policy gives preference to projects that have a lot of commercial tonnage. The deep draft projects meet that criteria and therefore they get the funding. The administration justifies this by saying that we have a fixed pot of money to work with, so we have to make the cutoff somewhere. Congressman Jones and others disagree with that approach by noting that the Federal government made a commitment to local communities when shallow draft and other projects were constructed with federal taxpayer dollars. Furthermore, Congressman Jones argues that there's something wrong when the Army Corps spends \$6.5 billion in Iraq in 2003, but it can only invest \$4.5 billion a year on maintaining waterway infrastructure in America. Waterways and beaches drive the economy of Eastern North Carolina and many other regions across the country, and we need to make the investment to keep those economic engines going.

**R:** - *Let's talk about the House version of the Energy & Water Development Appropriation Bill for FY 2006. It almost mirrored the President's budget and Congressman Jones' amendment offered on the House floor to shift ~\$20 million from the administration budget of the Department of Energy to the Corps for dredging, although receiving a very respectable amount of votes, was ultimately rejected. The Chairman of the Energy & Water appropriations subcommittee (Hobson R-OH) was also against the amendment and was not shy in saying so. What went wrong for the Jones amendment and for the bill as a whole?*

**J:** - The bill's funding levels for the Corps were woefully inadequate. For example, the Corps' Operations & Maintenance account, which funds their maintenance dredging activities, was set at \$2 billion -- that's \$1.7 billion less than what's needed across the country. Also, there are no new project starts in the Corps Construction account, beach nourishment funding was insufficient, and the bill included legislative language that limited the Corps ability to transfer money among projects. That transfer limitation is very problematic. Circumstances often change and in any given year the Corps can't spend all the money Congress gives it for a particular project. In those cases, it makes good sense to transfer the unused money to other projects that need it. Eastern North Carolina benefited tremendously from such transfers last year when Congressmen Jones and McIntyre worked with the Corps to get supplemental funding to dredge several of our inlets.

In regards to the Congressman's amendment, it was the first time that we can remember that a Member of Congress has stood up to the Appropriations Committee and said there is not enough funding for the Corps and the priorities in the bill are misplaced. The Congressman had a lot of courage to introduce that amendment considering there were not-so-veiled threats of repercussions against him for carrying it through to a vote. But he believes strongly that attention needs to be brought to this issue, and the amendment received 152 votes. That's an impressive number for any amendment, especially considering that during the vote, Appropriations Committee staff passed out a memo to Members of Congress that contained blatantly false information and which urged Members to vote against it. The vote also speaks volumes about the extent of the underfunding problem. Members who voted for the amendment felt so strongly about this that they were

**SHORELINES – July**  
**As presented to the *Island Review* magazine.**

willing to stand up to a powerful Subcommittee Chairman who has the ability to strip money away from their individual projects.

**R:** - *Wow, any thoughts on the Senate and House/Senate conference version of the bill that should be developed later this year?*

**J:** - Thankfully the Senate averted a filibuster crisis, and therefore the Senate can continue to work. Hopefully we can avoid an omnibus situation (note: an omnibus package is when a series of unfinished appropriation bills are wrapped into a single "mega-bill", usually well after the fiscal year starts). While I don't know about the specifics on the Senate side, we have been told that they will include higher amounts for Corps projects, which is good to hear.

**R:** - *The House/Senate conference bill should be interesting then if the news regarding the Senate holds true.*

**J:** - It will be interesting and Congressman Jones will continue fighting for projects when the bill is in conference. The two Senators from N.C. understand the issues at hand and there is a lot of pressure on them in light of the House bill figures.

**R:** - *Now for the all important question, what should citizens do today if they are interested in these issues, understanding that Congressman Jones is very supportive of keeping our beaches and waterways maintained?*

**J:** - There are a lot of things. The first thought is to get in touch with our two Senators. They are very aware of the problem and are supportive, but it doesn't hurt to let the Senate staff know this is a big issue for eastern N.C. and that their help is appreciated. Also, it would be worthy to contact the Administration, particularly the Office of Management & Budget (OMB), and inform OMB that there are a lot of needs for Federal dollars, but beach and waterway issues should be a major priority.

**R:** - *Josh, thanks for your time as always - we all understand it is hectic up in D.C. You really have helped us tremendously over the past few years.*

**J:** - Thank you; we continue to look forward to working with everyone regarding these issues.



Joshua Bowlen (r) and Greg "rudi" Rudolph (l) in Congressman Walter B. Jones' Washington, D.C. office following a meeting on June 8<sup>th</sup> with the Congressman, and Howard Marlowe and Paul Ordal with Marlowe & Co. (professional lobbyists for the Beach Commission).