

Top Headlines

Ohio River Basin Caucus Formed

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POSTED: October 27, 2009

WHEELING - Home to more than 8 percent of the nation's population, the Ohio River Basin's voice in Congress may get a little louder.

U.S. Reps. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., and Steve Driehaus, D-Ohio, on Monday announced the creation of the Ohio River Basin Congressional Caucus, a bipartisan interest group Capito believes will help lawmakers ensure the economic viability of the region for years to come.

Capito said the basin is home to about 25 million people - more than 8 percent of the United States' population. Yet, she said, the region doesn't receive the attention given other regions such as the Mississippi River and Chesapeake Bay watersheds.

With 55 Congressional districts in 14 states covering the region, Capito said the purpose of the caucus is to "raise the awareness of the Ohio River Valley and highlight the river's impact" on the nation's economy, infrastructure and agriculture. She noted major goals of the caucus will include securing funding for environmental restoration and cleanup, educational outreach, as well as discussing how pending legislation will affect the Ohio River Basin.

Originally from Glen Dale, Capito said she's crossed the Ohio River thousands of times without giving it much thought.

"It's one of those things ... you kind of take it for granted," she said, citing funding to keep the basin's drinking water supply clean and the maintenance of river infrastructure such as locks and dams as major issues facing the region today.

Capito and Driehaus will serve as co-chairs for the caucus. The group has been in the planning stages for about a month, and Capito said it already has garnered a positive reaction from her Congressional colleagues.

According to Capito, U.S. Reps. Charles Wilson, D-Ohio, and Nick Rahall, D-W.Va., are both on board with the caucus. Other members include Tim Ryan, D-Ohio; Rick Boucher, D-Va.; Jason Altmire, D-Pa.; and Geoff Davis, R-Ky., with more expected to sign on soon, she said.

In a time when legislation on issues such as health care reform and cap-and-trade has driven a wedge between Republicans and Democrats, Capito said keeping party politics out of the caucus will be key to its success.

She noted while cap-and-trade's effect on coal transports on the Ohio River may be something the caucus will have to deal with, she doesn't want to see the topic hinder the group's growth.