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SMITH RESOLUTION URGING ACTION ON DELAWARE & RARITAN CANAL **COMMISSION CLEARS SENATE**

TRENTON – A Senate resolution sponsored by Senator Bob Smith (D-Middlesex) that calls on Governor Christie to hire a new Executive Director and hire or rehire full-time staff for the Delaware and Raritan Canal Commission (DRCC) was today approved today by the full Senate.

“The importance of staffing and maintaining the DRCC simply cannot be denied. The Commission provides much needed environmental protection and oversight that the Department of Environmental Protection cannot. Moreover, rehiring of staff will come at absolutely no cost to the taxpayer. This is simply a no-brainer. Governor Christie’s move to eliminate the Commission is flat out wrong and must be reconsidered,” said Smith, chairman of the Environment and Energy Committee.

The resolution, SR-117, also expresses the Senate’s continued support of the DRCC and respectfully urges the Governor to uphold the “Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park Law of 1974” and the mission of the DRCC.

The Delaware and Raritan Canal, also known as the D & R Canal, is one of the state’s greatest natural assets, and is protected by the DRCC under the 37-year-old state law. The DRCC reviews and approves, rejects or modifies any action by the state in the D & R Canal State Park, or any permit for action in the park, undertakes planning for the development of the park, and prepares and administers a land use regulatory program that will protect the park from the harmful impacts of new development in central New Jersey. Additionally, throughout the years the DRCC has been able to secure millions of dollars through development entities in order to make canal improvements.

Last year, Governor Christie directed the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to identify authorities in the DEP that could be eliminated due to administrative redundancies. The DRCC was selected. But because the DEP’s actions along the D & R Canal are regulated by the Commission under the law, the takeover would be a conflict of interest.

In recent months, the DRCC lost its two support staff, with only the Executive Director remaining. The director will retire at the end of May, 2011, leaving the commission with no staff. If a new director is not appointed and the DRCC is left unstaffed, no permits can be approved and business, development, and economic growth in the region would be instantly halted indefinitely. Without proper staffing of the DRCC, even if the D & R Canal State Park were to be maintained, the integrity of the viewshed and the water quality of the canal would be jeopardized.