

FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE MONDAY, JUNE 29, 2015 CONTACT: DALYA EWAIS, 609-847-3700
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SMITH-GREENSTEIN LEGISLATION TO DEDICATE MONEY FROM CONTAMINATION SETTLEMENTS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PURPOSES ADVANCES

TRENTON – Legislation sponsored by Senate Environment and Energy Chair Bob Smith and Vice Chair Linda Greenstein that would ensure that all money received from contamination settlements is used for environmental purposes was approved today by the Senate.

“It is imperative that money awarded from environmental settlements is used for its intended purpose and not siphoned off to balance budgets or to fill gaps unrelated to the protection of New Jersey’s environment,” said Senator Smith (D-Middlesex, Somerset). “This amendment would dedicate the revenues from these settlements to a wide variety of environmental purposes, but still protect the funds from use unrelated to restoring and protecting the environment.”

The constitutional amendment proposed in the resolution (SCR-163) would dedicate all moneys from settlements and awards collected by the State in connection with legal claims based on environmental contamination to repair damage to, restore, or permanently protect the State’s natural resources. Moneys could also be used for funding constitutionally-permitted purposes, including open space, farmland, and historic preservation, water quality projects, the remediation of discharges of hazardous substances, and the upgrading, replacing, or closure of underground storage tanks.

The constitutional amendment would further specify that up to five percent of the moneys dedicated and appropriated may be expended for administrative costs of the State or its departments, agencies, or authorities.

“As it stands now, money received from environmental contamination settlements can be used for any state purpose. Previous attempts to ensure that the revenues were used for their intended purpose of preserving, repairing, or restoring our natural resources have failed under the current administration,” said Senator Greenstein (D-Mercer, Middlesex). “Putting this issue on the ballot will allow New Jersey voters to make the final decision on dedicating this money to environmental objectives.”

The legislation stems from the recent controversial ExxonMobil settlement, in which the current administration is proposing to accept \$225 million in compensation in natural resource damage liability related to ExxonMobil’s Bayway refinery in Linden and former Bayonne refinery, a refinery in Paulsboro, 16 additional facilities, and the company’s retail service stations. The original lawsuit asked for \$8.9 billion in damages.

The resolution, SCR-163, was approved by the Senate with a vote of 27-12. It now heads to the Assembly for consideration.

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