
Public Hearing

before

ASSEMBLY AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

ASSEMBLY CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 169

*(Amends Constitution to increase bonding cap for
Garden State Preservation Trust from \$1 billion to \$1.15 billion)*

LOCATION: Committee Room 8
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: June 5, 2003
2:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Robert J. Smith II, Chairman
Assemblyman Douglas H. Fisher, Vice-Chairman
Assemblyman Herb Conaway
Assemblyman Ronald S. Dancer
Assemblyman Michael J. Doherty



ALSO PRESENT:

Jeffrey T. Climpson
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide*

Maggie Manza
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aide*

Jennifer J. Rasch
*Assembly Republican
Committee Aide*

*Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey*

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ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Good afternoon. I'm Doug Fisher, Assembly Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Chairman Smith will be here momentarily. He asked if we would start the meeting in his absence. He will be back shortly.

We have three matters of business today. One, we have a public hearing on ACR-169. We also have two bills to be considered: Assembly Bill 2826 and Assembly Bill 3339.

We will be starting with the public hearing, and we have several people that wish to speak to this issue. With that-- And this meeting will be recorded.

We'll first take the roll call.

MR. CLIMPSON (Committee Aide): Chairman Smith, as mentioned, will be here shortly.

Vice-Chairman Fisher.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Here.

MR. CLIMPSON: Assemblyman Dancer.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: Here.

MR. CLIMPSON: Assemblyman Doherty.

ASSEMBLYMAN DOHERTY: Here.

MR. CLIMPSON: Assemblyman Conaway.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Here.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Thank you.

First, will be David Pringle, from the New Jersey Environmental Fund.

Okay, he won't be first.

Jeff Tittel.

JEFF TITTEL: Which bill?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: I think it's ACR-169.

MR. TITTEL: Oh, okay. I'm sorry, I didn't know which bill.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Before I'm going to ask you to testify, I'm going to ask the clerk to read the bill.

MR. TITTEL: Sure.

MR. CLIMPSON: This is the public hearing on Assembly Concurrent Resolution 169, the Constitutional Amendment to increase the bonding cap for the Garden State Preservation Trust from \$1 billion to \$1.15 billion.

MR. TITTEL: Thank you.

I'm here testifying on behalf of the New Jersey Sierra Club, that strongly supports this legislation. Quite frankly, basically, I can sum it up, very simply saying, "We need the money." When the trust was first put forward, a billion dollars seemed like a lot of money. It's not as much, considering the need that is out there in the State of New Jersey to buy open space, and to fix parks, and to preserve areas in the Highlands. And this goes a long way to help continue to do that.

The other part of this legislation that we think is important is that it doesn't cost the taxpayers any more money. It's because interest rates are lower now than they were when this bill was first passed. That allows us to, actually, raise the debt ceiling and to bond more, and still keep it under the \$98 million that's been dedicated for interest.

So it makes sense. This is, basically -- and I hate to use that term *free money*, because there's no, really, such thing -- but since the Legislature and the voters in New Jersey voted to put \$98 million a year towards open space, we can now expend another \$150 million, without costing the taxpayers any more money, and be able to buy at least 20,000 acres more of open space. And I think it's critical, as well as being able to fix parks and urban areas. And that will help protect our reservoirs up in the Highlands, as well as help stop sprawl in New Jersey.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Thank you very much.

Christina Meo.

CHRISTINA MEO: Meo. (indicating pronunciation)

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Meo. Mary (*sic*) Becker Associates for the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

MS. MEO: The Conservation Foundation would just like to be on record as supporting this bill.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: That's my kind of testimony.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: A little long-winded, but-- (laughter)

Tom Gilbert.

THOMAS A. GILBERT: Thank you.

My name is Tom Gilbert. I'm the Executive Director of The Highlands Coalition. And on behalf of the more than 100 members of The Highlands Coalition, I'd like to express our strong support for ACR-169.

Since we've already testified in support of both ACR-169 and A-3515 before this Committee, I will keep my remarks brief and provide copies of my original testimony. We believe this bill makes sense for both environmental and economic reasons. Current funding for open space and farmland preservation, in the Highlands and elsewhere, is insufficient. And this bill would help to close that gap and leverage additional Federal matching funds through the Highlands Stewardship Act.

Investing in community parks will, also, help to advance Smart Growth, by making existing communities more livable and reducing development pressure in areas targeted for preservation, such as the Highlands.

Finally, this bill is a good deal for taxpayers. By frontloading the process, the State, local governments, and non-profits can acquire land and develop parks at today's lower price, and at no additional cost to the taxpayers. So, for these reasons, we urge the passage of ACR-169 as soon as possible, so that the issue can go before the voters this fall.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Thank you, Tom.

I know I'm going to mess your last name, Richard -- Nieuwenhuis.

R I C H A R D E. N I E U W E N H U I S: Nieuwenhuis. (indicating pronunciation)

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Nieuwenhuis, New Jersey Farm Bureau.

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: It's so much easier than it's spelled. That's what happens when your father says he's going to leave his country, but not his name. (laughter)

Thank you very much.

I'm just going to make this real brief. Obviously, anything that has to do with farmland preservation money, and the increase thereof, New Jersey Farm Bureau is very, very much in favor of. We would have liked to have seen this split a little bit different, but we'll take it. And we hope that this goes forward in the fall, when it gets on the ballot.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN DOHERTY: Mr. Chairman, could I--

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN DOHERTY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Nieuwenhuis, there's been some discussion about the ratio changing. Could you give us an explanation of how you read that?

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: The ratio changing, as far as this bill?

ASSEMBLYMAN DOHERTY: Percentage going to farmland versus Green Acres, open space, preservation, park -- is that-- In your understanding, is this going to change the percentage of money -- the allocation going to farmland preservation in the State of New Jersey?

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: It is not going to change the allocation of the 60-40 on the original farmland preservation legislation. The way we are -- understand this whole thing is that, this is new money, and that farmland preservation will be getting 20 percent of that new money.

Now, it will not-- There's another bill out there, 3514, that's floating around, that would, in fact, change the funding numbers -- percentage -- of farmland preservation versus Green Acres, open space funding, historic preservation. That we are violently opposed to. Violently -- I'm not sure that's

the right word, but totally opposed to. But this bill we are not opposed to, because it does increase the amount of money towards farmland preservation. But 3514 we are definitely opposed to.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN DOHERTY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

And what are you hearing, as far as these competing bills? You're opposed to the one that's going to change the ratio for the old money, right?

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN DOHERTY: Is there any support for that, as far as you can tell?

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: I believe that there are some Assembly people out there that are supporting that, but our main agricultural areas -- we have been able to ascertain that. The Assemblymen and women, from that -- those main agriculture areas -- are very much in support of leaving the funding as it is.

ASSEMBLYMAN DOHERTY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN FISHER: Assemblyman Dancer.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Nieuwenhuis, I just want to follow up on Mike's comments here.

My understanding is that by virtue of the refinancing, we go from the 200 million to the 350 million level. So that 150 million annually is incremental, new money.

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: Okay. I've heard you mention a percentage of 20 percent for farmland. I wasn't aware -- or correct me if I'm wrong -- that in the bill, it is not specified as to the percentage allocation between farmland preservation and open space or park acquisition and development. Is it 80-20 on the new money -- on the 150?

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: The way our understanding is, on this bill is, that the 80 percent will go towards -- that is earmarked for parks and recreation-type acquisition and/or rehabilitation. And 20 percent is earmarked for farmland preservation.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: Okay. So it is 80-20 on the 150.

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: The 60-40 remains--

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: Remains, exactly.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: --on the original.

MR. NIEUWENHUIS: Yes, there was quite a bit of discussion about that, originally. But the original amount that was legislated in '98 -- is that correct -- I believe -- on that, that remains 60-40.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: Okay, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN ROBERT J. SMITH II (Chairman): David Pringle. Is David here? (no response)

David is in favor of the resolution.

John Watson.

JOHN S. WATSON JR.: Mr. Chairman, I'm just here to answer questions, if there are any.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Any questions for Mr. Watson? (no response)

And we have Rich -- Rich already spoke.

Is there anybody else that cares to testify? (no response)

Any questions or discussion among Committee members? (no response)

Okay. I think we'll close the hearing at this point.

Thank you.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)