

CONGRESS

Bemidji airport, Red Lake facility would get funds from Senate bill

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A massive spending bill moving through Congress includes \$1.5 billion in Bemidji area projects.

The U.S. House on Wednesday approved a \$410 billion omnibus spending bill that funds most of the federal government for the rest of the year. The U.S. Senate has yet to vote on its version.

But U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, DFL-Minn., the state's lone senator until an election contest is settled, said Wednesday that the Senate version includes \$107.6 million in federal funding for Minnesota projects as part of the Transportation and Housing and Urban Development portion of the omnibus bill.

Included in the package are:

- ▶ \$950,000 for terminal and fire safety improvements at Bemidji Regional Airport.

- ▶ \$475,000 for the design and construction of a multi-purpose youth and elderly facility for the Red Lake Band of Chippewa at Ponemah.

The bill also includes \$71 million for the Northstar Corridor commuter rail project. The 40-mile line from the Twin Cities northwest to Big Lake, will have station stops in Anoka, Coon Rapids and Elk River. The proposed schedule will include five inbound and one outbound trail each weekday morning and five outbound and one inbound trip each weekday afternoon.

Labor, Health and Human Services and Education funding in the Senate bill includes

nearly \$1 million to help veterans compete for jobs. The reintegration program will help veterans integrate back into civilian life by continuing a successful statewide initiative that ensures veterans receive the college credit equivalent to their military training – removing the barriers that many veterans encounter when returning to civilian life, Klobuchar said.

Specifically, the project will give special attention to younger veterans and those who are medically discharged or disabled. Additionally, the initiative will make it possible for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the state Department of Employment and Economic Development and Veterans Affairs representatives and counselors to coordinate closely so they better serve veterans interested in pursuing a higher education degree and customize programs to meet veterans' needs.

"There wasn't a waiting line when our brave men and women in uniform signed up to serve and there shouldn't be one when they return home," the Minnesota Democrat said in a statement. "This funding will help make sure our veterans get the education and training they need to reenter the work force, find good-paying jobs and return home to their families."

The U.S. House passed its \$410 billion version in a 245-178 vote that saw 20 Democrats voting against the measure, including U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, DFL-7th District.

The measure includes \$28.4 million in funding in all sections of the bill in the 8th Congressional District, according to figures provided by Oberstar.

"This legislation makes important investments that are important to Minnesota," Oberstar said in a statement. "We are investing in wastewater treatment plants, purchasing better equipment for first responders and providing guidance and education for children."

Among projects is \$300,000 for an Itasca County 911 radio system, \$727,000 for three-state wolf predation management, \$95,000 to the Minnesota Humanities Commission for improving Ojibwe and Dakota student performance and \$475,000 for high-speed passenger rail service from Duluth to Minneapolis.

The House bill also includes \$3.5 million for a Koochiching Forest Legacy Phase III program and \$1 million for Superior National Forest land acquisition.

And, the bill includes \$4.5 million for a Wood Utilization Research Center at the Natural Resources Research Center in Duluth to conduct research and development into new wood products.

While House Democrats maintain the bill includes only \$3.8 billion in pet projects or earmarks, or 5 percent less than last year, the Taxpayers for Common Sense said the bill contained 8,570 earmarks at a cost of \$7.7 billion.

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