Bill Would Give La. Largest Coal Port in U.S.

Washington, D.C.—U.S. Senator Bennett Johnston predicted that the ports of Baton Rouge and New Orleans will become “the largest coal exporting terminals in the nation, perhaps the largest in the world” as a result of legislation sponsored by Johnston and Senator John Warner of Virginia.

The Ports and Navigation Improvement Act, introduced today in the Senate, cites the “vital importance of ports and harbors to this country’s economy and national defense, and the world’s economy and energy self-sufficiency.” The bill provides for “expeditious construction of essential river and harbor improvements in order to promote domestic commerce and U.S. export capabilities for coal and other commodities.”

The measure will specifically authorize the dredging of the following harbors and channels from a current depth of 40 feet to a depth of 55 feet: The Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico; Norfolk Harbor and channels, Virginia; and Mobile Harbor, Alabama.

Johnston said the deeper Mississippi River channel will give large ocean transport vessels access to the Ports of Baton Rouge and New Orleans, eliminating the practice of “light loading.”

“As a result,” Johnston said, “these ports will rapidly become the largest coal-exporting terminal in the nation, and perhaps the largest in the world, with a potential of at least 100 million tons by 1990 and double that by the year 2000.”

“For Louisiana, savings on transportation costs should be over a billion dollars per year by 1990. In practical terms for Louisiana residents this will mean thousands of jobs directly and indirectly from the increased activity at the ports. By saving energy costs for industries along the river it will attract more industries and more jobs. Our tax base will be greatly expanded and our tax burdens diminished,” Johnston said.

Johnston said he has joined Senator Warner in sponsoring the legislation during the closing days of the current session of Congress “in order to lay the foundation for prompt action on the bill early next year.”

“Because of the critical importance of this legislation to the transportation of energy resources and because of its tremendous significance to the nation’s economy, we expect the Ports and Navigation Improvement Act to be given top priority in the coming session of Congress,” Johnston said.