Ellender, Waggonner Promise To Support Red River Project

By BobLuckett of The Times Staff


The two were featured speakers at a luncheon meeting Tuesday that closed out the 47th annual convention of the association, which attracted members from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana.

Ellender, 81-year-old president pro temp of the Senate and chairman of the powerful purse-string Senate Appropriations Committee, pledged to the convention navigation on the Red River by 1980. Waggonner termed Ellender the key man in Washington to obtain the funds for the project.

Three Years

Earlier in the in the day, Army Maj. Gen. Charles C. Noble, Lower Mississippi Valley division engineer, excelled Ellender's prediction by three years.

Said the general Tuesday morning, "If funds are provided at the rate we have programmed, and barring unforeseen obstacles, we intend to have a nine-foot channel into Shreveport by mid-1983."

The discrepancy in dates is probably due to the extent of navigation each had in mind.

In a booming voice with a hint of Cajun accent, Ellender outlined his strategy to circumvent a pending federal ruling that would halt work on the Red River Waterway and the Arkansas Red River Chloride Control Project.

Declared Ellender, "The Office of Management and Budget (MB) has insisted on the use of the opportunity cost of money as the basis for determining the discount rate to be used in arriving at the present worth of future benefits."

He explained this was bureaucracy for the OMB's trying to make it almost impossible to justify new public works projects.

Ellender, who has spent more than 35 years in the Senate, said he and other members of the Louisiana delegation would attempt to get the two projects exempt from the anticipated ruling on a legal technicality.

He expressed confidence at succeeding.

The venerable senator said his top priority for the Red River Waterway is to add $1.2 million for bank stabilization to the $1 million already budgeted for waterway planning in fiscal 1973.

Declared Ellender, "I am going to do everything in my power to get that money added to the 1973 appropriations bill."

To illustrate the power he does wield, Ellender said that when he first came to the Senate it took him two weeks to get an appointment with a cabinet member or a chief of staff.

Now, he said, he has to keep his doors locked to discourage supplicants of all ranks and station.

May Have Opposition

Ellender faces probable opposition for his Senate seat this year. Among the hopefuls for the seat is State Sen. J. Bennett Johnston of Shreveport.

Obviously Ellender's age will be a major issue should he have opposition. Waggonner, attempting to dispell any doubts about Ellender's vitality, said the senator can work harder than many men 50 years his junior.

Continued Waggonner, "I don't know where he found it, but Sen. Ellender has access to the fountain of youth."

Also addressing the convention Tuesday morning were Arthur W. Busch of Dallas, Region 6 administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, and Army Brig. Gen. Kenneth B. Cooper of Washington, D.C., deputy director of civil works for the Corps of Engineers.