

Team,

As you saw earlier this week, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) was just fully reauthorized for 5 years within the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA - which authorizes the US Army Corps of Engineers and maintains waterways and ports as well as guarantees access to clean and safe drinking water). I wanted to give you a little more information about the EDA Reauthorization and how we got here.

Legislative action is often a long-game, one played out over several months as competing priorities, competing stakeholders, and competing legislators all battle to drive action. In recent years, fueled by a host of factors, legislative action in the Halls of Congress have come to a grinding halt. Evidence of this is seen today as Congress tries to agree on a spending bill before another government shutdown.

In its heyday, the 96th Congress passed more than 1,200 bills from 1979-1980, including major legislation that created the U.S. Department of Education. Over the past four years, we have seen a stark decline in Congress' ability or willingness to act, leading to a decrease in bills passed into law that is striking:

2019-2020: the 116th Congress passed 344 laws

2021-2022: the 117th Congress passed 365 laws

2023-2024: the 118th Congress has passed only 82 laws, including just 27 in 2024

This means that over the past two years we have seen the lowest number of laws passed by Congress in the United States' history. This also shows how difficult it is to have a law passed in today's environment, and how critical it is to drive bipartisan support.

There are two main functions that Congress plays when it comes to legislative action, which both eventually lead to laws being enacted:

Authorization: grants the legal authority to establish or continue a federal program or agency. Authorization sets policy goals, guidelines and sometimes funding levels, but does not provide actual funds.

Appropriations: provides the actual funding for programs or agencies authorized by Congress.

In short, authorization defines what a program can do and sets funding limits while appropriations allocate actual money for the program to operate within those limits. Programs or agencies are often authorized for a set amount of time, and then reauthorized to reflect any needed changes for those programs or agencies. In the case of the EDA, it

was last authorized was in 2004, meaning it still mostly reflected the needs of the agency from two decades prior.

That is what makes the passing this week of EDA reauthorization so important, especially given that it is one of only 27 bills have been passed this year.

EDA was first authorized during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965. EDA is a federal agency within the Department of Commerce created to support economic growth and development in communities across the United States, particularly in regions facing economic distress.

As we all know, the economic development field is changing dramatically. While EDA is just one of many federal partners that provide programs and funding for economic development activity, as the only federal agency solely focused on economic development, it is critical that it reflects the needs of communities big and small across the United States. This reauthorization recognizes that and addresses many of the needs directly identified by IEDC members.

As we learn more about how EDA reauthorization was finalized, it is clear that this was passed by both houses of Congress because stakeholders, like our members, made it clear to Members of Congress that this was critical. No amount of political theatre made this happen, as WRDA passed as one of the most bipartisan efforts brought forward in this Congress, with vote tallies of 399-19 in the U.S. House of Representatives and 97-1 in the U.S. Senate. Representatives Sam Graves (MO) and Rick Larsen (WA), and Senators Shelley Moore Capito (WV) and Tom Carper (DE) came together in bipartisan fashion to move this bill forward, navigating difficult conversations and a tight window of opportunity among a slew of last second bills trying to make their way through the process. In fact, as I was watching the Senate vote happen, you could see Senators Capito and Carper working the room together to advocate for their peers to vote yes. This can only happen when the legislation is truly bipartisan and represents the needs of communities of all sizes from all regions of the country.

Economic development is bipartisan. It impacts every single community and drives the economy. This is why IEDC, along with so many others, were successful in helping to drive this bill over the finish line. We did not get every item we asked for (no one does in a bill of this size), but this is a big victory for the economic development community, and most importantly, for the communities we collectively serve.

I have personally been working on this issue for more than 10 years. IEDC has been at this for the last 20. Many of our members have been along for that journey alongside us.

Policy is hard, and often takes luck to move. It also takes a coalition of partners and members to raise the voice of those most affected by policy. That is why we do this work, to celebrate the great days like we had this week, and to recognize the hard days where we fail, but get back up to keep pushing. Thanks to all of you who have helped in this effort, this victory is not just for EDA, but for the economic development community. Onward!