Vern Buchanan, Alcee Hastings back $100 million funding for red tide

The chairmen of Florida’s Congressional delegation co-sponsored a $100-million proposal to fight red tide.
U.S. Reps. Vern Buchanan, a Sarasota Republican, and Alcee Hastings, a Delray Beach Democrat, on Friday announced support for bipartisan legislation to combat harmful algae blooms savaging Florida’s coastline.

“Our economy, environment and marine life is under siege by this crisis and we need all hands on deck to help Florida deal with the problem,” Buchanan said.

The Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act would provide $22 million in funding each fiscal year from 2019 through 2023 to assess and mitigate environmental, economic and health effects of the harmful algae, according to Sally Dionne, Buchanan’s district director.

The bill also adds the Army Core of Engineers formally to the federal Harmful Algal Bloom Federal Interagency Task Force, a group that would be re-authorized by the legislation.

Oregon Rep. Suzanne Bonamici formally introduced the legislation in the House in November. In May, the bill was referred to an environmental subcommittee. Buchanan and Hastings signed on as co-sponsors on Aug. 17.
The Senate in July passed similar legislation by a voice vote. Hastings and Buchanan at that point urged House leaders to simply take up and pass the Senate version of the bill.

Buchanan a week ago met with scientists at Mote Marine Laboratory, which is located within his district, about the need for more federal funding to combat red tide.

“As a challenging Florida red tide bloom persists along the Gulf Coast, it is appropriate that Congressman Vern Buchanan chose to visit Mote Marine Laboratory’s City Island research campus today to discuss the latest developments in our innovative, red tide-focused science, technology and public outreach programs,” said Mote Marine Laboratory President and CEO Dr. Michael Crosby.

And since both Buchanan and Hastings have served as co-chairs of the state delegation, they have worked closely on environmental issues such as red tide. Last year, the two chaired a meeting in Washington on the issue.

“We should be doing all we can to preserve the natural beauty of our state’s beaches and waterways,” Hastings said then. “Coasts, lakes and
rivers are key contributors to Florida’s thriving economy and serve as a vital habitat for plants and wildlife.”

Hastings overwhelmingly won his Democratic primary on Tuesday and faces only write-in opposition in November.

But Buchanan has been in one of the more closely watched general match-ups in Florida. Democratic opponent David Shapiro has hit Buchanan for taking money from Big Sugar, which he argued contributed to red tide because of pollution.

Buchanan’s office, for its part, said red tide is “naturally occurring” and that the discharged from Lake Okeechobee credited with blue-green algal blooms on the Caloosahatchee River isn’t causing red tide.

“Multiple nutrients may be impacting algal blooms,” Dionne said.

Jacob Ogles

Jacob Ogles has covered politics in Florida since 2000 for regional outlets including SRQ Magazine in Sarasota, The News-Press in Fort Myers and The Daily Commercial in Leesburg. His work has appeared nationally in The Advocate, Wired and other publications. Events like SRQ’s Where The Votes Are workshops made Ogles one of Southwest
Florida’s most respected political analysts, and outlets like WWSB ABC 7 and WSRQ Sarasota have featured his insights. He can be reached at jacobogles@hotmail.com.

1 Comment

Elizabeth Hodges
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Wait. Money FOR red tide?