



March 20, 2026

Senator Tammy Duckworth

525 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

<https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/>

Dear Senator Duckworth:

The purpose of this letter is to share concerns from the League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region (UMRR), on two proposed laws: the Promoting Efficient Review for Modern Infrastructure Today Act (PERMIT Act) and the Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development (SPEED Act). UMRR represents more than sixty local Leagues throughout the five states of the Upper Mississippi Basin – Minnesota (MN), Wisconsin (WI), Iowa (IA), Illinois (IL), and Missouri (MO). We work through education and advocacy to ensure sound policies that protect water quality and quantity in the Mississippi River Basin.

Both the PERMIT Act and the SPEED Act are currently being considered in the Senate and could generate sweeping changes to long-standing federal environmental protections, particularly under the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. These laws have served for decades as foundational safeguards protecting water quality, ecosystems, public health, and democratic participation in environmental decision-making.

Our concerns are as follows:

PERMIT Act

The PERMIT Act was developed to streamline infrastructure and energy projects by accelerating environmental reviews under the Clean Water Act (CWA), and reducing red tape for construction, agriculture, and energy projects by shortening review timelines. This includes:

- extending CWA Section 402 discharge and Section 404 dredge and fill permit terms from 5 to 10 years,
- accelerating federal permit review, and limiting legal challenges to within 60 days of permit approval

- weakens Section 401 water quality certification which limits state's ability to block projects,
- decreases liability for industrial dischargers releasing contaminants such as PFAS and forever chemicals to surface waters,
- restricts the EPA from vetoing projects that could harm fisheries and wildlife,
- redefines navigable waters as contained in the Waters of the US Rule,
- limits consultation under the Endangered Species Act,
- and decreases time for filing claims on permits and increasing difficulty to sue over unauthorized pollution discharges.

The PERMIT Act's proposed narrowing of protected waters and extension of permit durations would significantly weaken federal oversight of discharges and dredge-and-fill activities. This poses heightened risks to Illinois's lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater systems, which are central to the state's economy, outdoor heritage, and drinking water supply. Reduced EPA authority and shortened timelines for legal challenges would limit accountability and public recourse, potentially allowing harmful projects to proceed without adequate review. Of particular concern is the reduced liability for contaminants such as PFAS, which are persistent chemicals linked to serious health and environmental harms.

SPEED Act:

The SPEED Act proposes actions to streamline review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for projects and permitting of federal infrastructure and energy projects. The changes include:

- limiting NEPA review to direct impacts only, nothing in regard to up stream or down stream impacts,
- requiring agency decisions on completeness of an application to 60 days,
- limiting litigation to 150 days after a permit or project decision and filing only by those who are directly impacted,
- avoidance of NEPA review if projects have already undergone state, tribal or other federal review,
- and decrease in court ability to substitute their judgment for that of federal agencies.

The SPEED Act's restructuring of environmental review under NEPA would curtail comprehensive analysis of cumulative and climate-related impacts, restrict public and Tribal participation, and narrow judicial oversight. By limiting review to direct impacts and imposing strict procedural timelines, the Act risks overlooking long-term environmental degradation, disproportionate community impacts, and evolving scientific evidence. Reduced opportunities for public engagement undermine transparency and democratic governance in decisions that may permanently alter landscapes and communities.

Together, the PERMIT and the SPEED Acts could accelerate fossil fuel infrastructure development while weakening environmental safeguards designed to prevent pollution, protect water resources, and ensure informed public participation. For the Upper Mississippi River Region—home to extensive freshwater systems, Tribal treaty-protected resources, and climate-vulnerable ecosystems—the implications are particularly serious.

Given the scale of the proposed regulatory changes and their potential to affect water quality, public health, climate stability, and community oversight nationwide, these issues warrant careful scrutiny and deliberate consideration by the Senate. We urge you to oppose the passage of PERMIT and SPEED Acts to prevent the potentially disastrous outcomes to the environment and climate change.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Miller, UMRR-ILO Chairman

Becky Simon, LWV Illinois, President