

Congress rated on votes to conserve Chicago Tribune

February 21, 2002

By Michael Kilian, Washington Bureau

Battles between the Bush administration and environmentalists over Arctic oil exploration and other controversies have polarized Congress on environmental issues as seldom before, according to a League of Conservation Voters report issued Wednesday.

In its annual assessment of lawmakers' environmental voting records, the league found that last year a small number of moderate Republicans making common cause with Democrats in both houses sufficed to block most Bush initiatives opposed by environmentalists, including the president's proposal to drill for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and another to allow higher levels of arsenic in drinking water. The two parties, however, generally were far apart on conservation and environmental protection, issues that are expected to be significant in this autumn's congressional elections.

The Democrats control the Senate by one seat, and a shift of six House seats in November would remove the Republicans from power.

"The general results of this 2001 score card reveal a disturbing trend," said league President Deb Callahan. "Since 1981, Congress has become more sharply divided on the environment. Although the averages [for both houses] have remained roughly the same, more members than ever have perfect 100s, and more members than ever also have zeros. In 1981, there were nine scores of zero in the House and 22 scores of 100 percent. [In 2001] 97 House members had zeros and 58 scored 100."

Democrats in the Senate averaged a league approval rating of 82, while House Democrats averaged 81. House Republicans had an average rating of 16, while Republicans in the Senate averaged 9.

In the Illinois delegation, Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin had a 100 percent league rating; Republican Sen. Peter Fitzgerald had a 38. Republican Reps. Philip Crane and John Shimkus had zero ratings, while Democrats Jesse Jackson Jr. and Jan Schakowsky had 100 percent, according to the report.

The league rated Illinois Republican Rep. Ray LaHood one of the "most improved" because his environmental voting score rose to 50 percent last year from 20 percent in 2000.

The group based its assessment on eight key Senate votes and 14 House votes, including the nomination of lawyer Gale Norton for secretary of the interior; oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge; drilling in national monument areas, the Gulf of Mexico and the Great Lakes; farmland conservation; arsenic levels in drinking water; and votes on measures calling for greater auto

fuel economy, among others.

Other Illinois Democrats were rated as follows: Bobby Rush, 57; William Lipinski, 36; Luis Gutierrez, 93; Rod Blagojevich, 93; Danny Davis, 93; Jerry Costello, 64; Lane Evans, 86; and David Phelps, 43.

The scores for the other Illinois Republican House members were: Henry Hyde, 14; Mark Kirk, 71; Jerry Weller, 29; Judy Biggert, 21; Timothy Johnson, 64; and Donald Manzullo, 7.

Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) was not rated because, as is customary, he did not participate in many votes. His rating in the previous Congress was 17 percent.

Midwestern members of Congress trail their New England and mid-Atlantic counterparts in support for the environment but are rated far ahead of representatives from Western and Southern states, the league said.

