

Pair of lawmakers hope to save harbor industries

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Ice floats in Waukegan Harbor in February 2007 along the Gypsum Plant in Waukegan. (News-Sun file)

Two lawmakers are trying to save industries at Waukegan Harbor from collapse following the city's decision to de-industrialize the harbor and last week's announcement by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to withdraw support for a \$36 million dredging project.

State Rep. Eddie Washington, D-Waukegan, and JoAnn Osmond, R-Antioch, say they do not want to lose the Waukegan shipping terminal and have vowed to support National Gypsum, Lafarge and St. Mary's Cement.

The lawmakers are concerned about the potential loss of 117 jobs and the impact on trucking companies and ship workers if Waukegan is able to "deindustrialize the harbor," which could create a \$4.3 million loss for the city.

"We have companies that have been here since the early 1950s," Washington said.

"We are taking away part of Waukegan's history and damaging commercial interests. In a day and age where jobs and industry are being shipped overseas, this just does not seem right."

"I understand and appreciate the move to clean up the harbor and beautify it," Osmond said. "What I don't understand is why it has to be at the expense of these employees and their families."

Washington said the city has proposed reducing the depth of the harbor to prevent commercial vessels from entering. Doing so would shut down important contributors to Waukegan, he said.

National Gypsum, Lafarge and St. Mary's Cement have sent letters to the City Council urging them to back an agreement supported by all parties and take into consideration the workers and their families.

"We are wasting our time and resources by plotting a move against the good citizens of Waukegan," Washington said. "We can work together, set aside personal agendas aside and get the job done."