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Kasich bucks GOP, vetoes lake bill

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Republican Gov. John Kasich and his GOP colleagues in the General Assembly saw eye to eye on the budget, Senate Bill 5, and myriad other pieces of legislation this year.

But not on House Bill 231, the controversial bill that would've allowed entities to withdraw up to 5 million gallons of water a day from Lake Erie without a permit.

Kasich issued his first veto as governor yesterday, striking down the GOP-sponsored bill that was supported by every Republican legislator and a total of three Democrats in the House and Senate.

The governor's veto drew a swift rebuke from bill sponsor Rep. Lynn R. Wachtmann, R-Napoleon, who accused Kasich of buckling under media scrutiny and pressure from Michigan and New York officials.

"I think he's tired of getting beat up and thought he'd screw the business community and look popular," Wachtmann said. "I didn't know the Ohio governor worked for the governors of New York and Michigan. If we thought he worked for Ohio, we're mistaken."

In a statement sent by email announcing the veto, Kasich said while most of the bill fulfilled Ohio's obligations under the Great Lakes Compact, "portions of it must be improved."

"Namely, Ohio's legislation lacks clear standards for conservation and withdrawals and does not allow for sufficient evaluation and monitoring of withdrawals or usage," Kasich said.

Wachtmann, who said Kasich's office blamed the veto on failures by the Department of Natural Resources, said he is going to ask for a veto override.



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"Using (bureaucracy) as an excuse to veto a bill like this is outrageous," Wachtmann said. "I warned him several times to clean house and get people in office who know what they're doing. Evidently he loves bureaucrats."

House Speaker William G. Batchelder said in a statement, "I am deeply disappointed by the veto of House Bill 231, which I believe required earlier attention than it received by members of Gov. Kasich's cabinet. This legislation, in whatever form, needs attention so that Ohio continues its stewardship of Lake Erie and the streams which are tributaries of the lake."

Kasich was under mounting pressure to veto the bill. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo suggested "potential legal action" on Thursday if Kasich signed it, and *The Plain Dealer* of Cleveland has editorialized against the measure.

The bill also was opposed by former Republican Govs. Bob Taft and George V. Voinovich, the Ohio Environmental Council, the National Wildlife Federation, the Nature Conservancy, the Alliance for the Great Lakes and past directors of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

But the bill did have the support of business interests - which are typically cozy with Kasich and vice versa - including the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, which hailed the bill as a jobs-friendly proposal that would provide economic certainty about future water resources from the Great Lakes.

"The liberal environmentalists want to misuse the Great Lakes Compact to place unnecessary and expensive hurdles in front of businesses that will seek to take advantage of northern Ohio's overly abundant natural resource - freshwater - to relocate or expand their water-use-dependent businesses in northern Ohio," Sen. Timothy J. Grendell, R-Chesterland, wrote in a letter to Kasich yesterday.

Under the bill, Ohio would've had the weakest restrictions for water withdrawal among the eight states and two Canadian provinces that signed the 2008 Great Lakes Compact.

The goal of the compact, which became U.S. law when signed by former President George W. Bush, was to protect and conserve the Great Lakes, which account for 18 percent of the world's freshwater.

"I would like to thank Gov. Kasich for recognizing the grave concerns that we raised regarding House Bill 231 and for vetoing this extreme and dangerous legislation," Rep. Dennis Murray, D-Sandusky, said in a statement sent by email.

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