

Huntington Beach Pier gains unlikely ally: Dennis Brown

By Frank Mickadeit

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HUNTINGTON BEACH — The first piece of legislation designed to help finance the rebuilding of the Huntington Beach Municipal Pier has come from an unlikely source: Assemblyman Dennis Brown.

Brown, R-Rossmoor, known primarily for his aversion to spending bills, last week quietly introduced AB 153, which he believes is the first appropriation measure he has authored in his 11 years in the Legislature.

The bill calls for allocating an unspecified amount of money from the state's general fund to rebuild the landmark pier, which was declared unsafe and closed during the summer after an extensive engineering study.

Storms in January tore away 250 feet of the pier, including a two-story restaurant at the end. Engineers have recommended that the



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entire pier be rebuilt and estimate it will cost \$10.6 million.

Brown on Friday acknowledged his distaste for parochial, pork-barrel legislation, but said that the

closure of the pier has had an impact far beyond Huntington Beach and the rest of his district.

"Most of the people who use the facility are from out of Huntington Beach and are from a surrounding area of 10 million people," Brown said. "It's a significant use by a significant portion of the state of California. ... We will need to show that this is not a local, pork-barrel-type issue."

Brown was asked to introduce the bill by former Huntington Beach Mayors Ron Shenkman and Jack Kelly, members of the pier fund-raising committee.

"One of the main reasons for going to him was because of his recognized frugality," Kelly said. "If Dennis Brown were to see merit in this we would have one of the damndest supporters there ever was."

Like Brown, Kelly plans to lobby

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PIER: Most visitors from outside city

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the bill on the basis of the pier's regional renown. Kelly said surveys indicate that only 14 percent to 18 percent of the 600,000 people who visit pier annually are from Huntington Beach. About 39 percent of the beachgoers are from Los Angeles County, he said.

Brown said no specific figure was included in the bill because of uncertainties in the state budget and because the new pier's final design and cost still are under review.

A very rough estimate by Kelly indicates the city needs between \$6 million and \$7 million after obtaining financing from other sources, including private donors and various governmental agencies. The Federal Emergency Management Agency already has committed to approximately \$1.8 million, the county has authorized \$250,000 and about \$50,000 has come in from private donors.

Although it has been suggested that the city could make up the difference itself, Kelly believes that the state, through Brown's legislation, should carry most of the burden since the majority of the pier's visitors are from outside the city.

When the Seal Beach pier was destroyed by winter storms, a civic group called Save Our Pier raised more than \$170,000. The money was added to federal and state funding to provide the \$2.3 million needed to reconstruct the pier, a community focal point since 1906. It reopened during ceremonies Jan. 27, 1985.

Brown said the Huntington Beach Pier bill will not be heard in committee for two or three months and could not be signed by the governor before August. If signed, however, it would take effect immediately under an emergency clause included in the bill.

The city hopes to approve a design for the pier in February and begin construction in 1989. The target date for reopening is June 1991.

Fund raising from non-governmental sources will continue throughout this year with two or three major events, Shenkman said.

The biggest chunk of the \$1 million his group hopes to raise — \$300,000 to \$400,000 — probably will come from "selling" square-foot-sized pieces of the pier for \$25 each and giving each buyer a "grant deed," he said.