

GREAT LAKES CITIES INITIATIVE
2003 WINTER MEETING
DECEMBER 12, 2003
PEGGY NOTEBAERT NATURE MUSEUM
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Mayor Daley opened the meeting with a welcome to Chicago and a statement about the importance of the Great Lakes and the significance of the role of mayors in protecting them. After an introduction to the Nature Museum by their CEO and President Joe Shacter, the meeting moved to the presentations by Congressmen Rahm Emanuel and Mark Kirk.

Congressman Emanuel gave the highlights of the Great Lakes Restoration bill and spoke about the current status of sponsors, which included 105 in the House and 10 in the companion Senate bill. He also explained the efforts to get the President to include reference to it in the State of the Union address. Congressman Kirk said the bill addresses how to clean up the lakes, but that we need to remember the importance of keeping them clean. He referenced situations where cleanups are delayed because too many agencies have the ability to veto decisions and that reviews are not coordinated among agencies. He expressed concern about the proposal to weaken mercury standards because of the potential effects on the Great Lakes, but supports the emission trading approach to reducing mercury and other emissions. A dialogue among the mayors and congressmen followed during which several speakers emphasized the importance of recognition by federal levels of government of the importance of local governments on Great Lakes issues. The mayors highlighted the strength they have by working together, especially with elected federal officials considering Great Lakes legislation. The mayors decided that a resolution to the federal governments and a second one to other local governments and organizations would be helpful in the cause.

Next on the agenda was the introduction of Ohio Governor Bob Taft, Chair of the Council of Great Lakes Governors, by Mayor Jack Ford of Toledo. Governor Taft said he was pleased to be meeting with the Mayors and looked forward to working with them on Great Lakes restoration. He talked about the Governors' priorities, which had been submitted to Congress earlier in the fall, and mentioned the state-by-state meetings that would be held concerning the priorities. He encouraged mayoral participation. After highlighting the major problems facing the Great Lakes, he emphasized the importance of the Great Lakes Restoration bills, and said he had been speaking with the White House about them. The Federal government can't be expected to pay for all the costs, as states and cities must do their part. States and cities must be full partners with the Federal government in making decisions. He said the "stars were aligned" for the cities and states to move forward together on the Great Lakes.

Lead by Mayor Daley and Governor Taft, all the attendees participated in a press conference to announce the Governor/Mayor partnership on Great Lakes Restoration. Governor Taft and Mayor Daley made comments, as did several other mayors. There

were a number of questions related to the Great Lakes before the press went to more questions of local interest.

The luncheon speaker was Dr. Joel Scheraga , US EPA's National Program Director for the Global Change Research Program, a recognized expert on climate change and its effects on the Great Lakes. Dr. Scheraga emphasized that climate change is real, it will continue to change, it has important consequences, the impacts are already visible today, and that cities can take actions to address this. Generally, it is warmer and there is more rainfall in more intense amounts. The effects will be on health, agriculture, forests, water resources, coastal areas, and habitat. Problems to be dealt with include more combined sewer overflows, impacts on shipping, and deaths during heat waves. The types of things cities can do to address the problems are designing improved sewer systems to deal with increased loads, create heat stress warning systems, improve water conservation, limit development in flood prone areas, and many others. The mayors had a number of questions for Dr. Scheraga, which he addressed.

The focus in the afternoon was on a number of case studies from different cities. Mayor Miller of Toronto led off with a presentation on the lakefront and water management programs underway in Toronto. He talked about land turned over to the City by oil companies, which then had to be cleaned up. He talked about redevelopment plans, and the importance of public access to the lake. He added that management of wet weather flows as a resource could help prevent the kind of damage that is now occurring. Mayor King of Gary talked about the plans in Gary for a greenway that would include a long stretch of lakefront currently owned by US Steel. He is working with developers to get them to agree to the cleanup work as part of the deal. The hope is that this will all help with economic development. He also spoke about the cleanup of contaminated sediments in the Grand Calumet River, and how long it is taking under Federal consent decrees. Mayor Daley next spoke about how important planning is to keeping things green, and how important access to the lake is to people. The City should take the lead on what it can do, and hope others will follow. Transportation Director D'Escoto talked about how his department is working with others in the City on water management, including the use of landscaped medians, storm drains to separate the dirty first flush, and permeable surfaces for alleys. Next, Chris Ronayne, Planning Director from Cleveland, gave an historical perspective on Cleveland's lakefront and the plans underway to redevelop it. The key problem Cleveland is facing is access to the lakefront for the public, and they are doing much to improve it. This is central to their plans to attract more tourists and create more residential living opportunities for people near the lake.

The final discussion was a brief consideration of priorities and goals for the Great Lakes Cities Initiative, lead by Mayor Irby of Marquette and Mayor Becker of Racine. Because there was so little time, there was only an opportunity to present some ideas for consideration. The Mayors agreed to continue the discussion with the Steering Committee.

The meeting concluded at about 3:00 pm.