

**Remarks of Governor Bob Taft
Chair, Council of Great Lakes Governors**

**Great Lakes Cities Initiative Winter Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
December 12, 2003**

Thank you, Mayor Ford. I also want to thank Mayor Daley for hosting this meeting and for his leadership on Great Lakes restoration issues. I commend all of the mayors for being here today to organize your efforts to protect the invaluable resource we have in the Great Lakes.

Congressmen Emanuel and Kirk, thank you for your leadership on this issue in Congress. We all represent the 40 million citizens who live in the Great Lakes basin. Working together, Governors, Mayors, Members of Congress, we have a tremendous opportunity to build a strong, lasting partnership that can advance our cause further than each of us working alone.

The Great Lakes are an international treasure. They are part of our identity. They are a tremendous strategic asset that will help secure our region's future. You only have to go to Navy Pier or enjoy the view of Lake Michigan from the Shedd Aquarium to appreciate the tremendous potential of our Great Lakes to improve the quality of life in our cities, stimulate tourism and commerce, and provide abundant water resources that are the envy of those in more arid regions.

But we can't afford to be complacent. The Great Lakes are at a crossroads. There has been tremendous improvement since Time magazine published Lake Erie's obituary, since the Cuyahoga River caught fire and galvanized passage of the Clean Water Act

more than 30 years ago. But if we learned anything from those days, it is that ecosystems are living, growing, and changing things. Change is constant, and despite our considerable accomplishments, the Great Lakes face changes that once again threaten their viability.

Invasive species pose perhaps the most serious and potentially destructive threat to face the Great Lakes in a century. These non-native plants and animals—introduced by design, accident or carelessness—are changing the lakes' ecological balance in ways we do not fully understand. Alien aquatic species are arriving in the Great Lakes at a pace of at least one new invasive species per year—a threat of major proportions. For example, in Lake Erie there is growing evidence that zebra and quagga mussels are leading contributors to algae blooms, oxygen depletion, and perhaps even to botulism that has reappeared in the Eastern Basin.

As Mayor Daley well knows, the giant Asian carp, an up to 100-pound fish that eats everything in its path, is making its way up the Chicago sanitary and ship canal, and if it reaches the Great Lakes, the ecological and economic impact could be devastating. In a November 14 letter to Congress, I called upon members to act quickly to pass and fund the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act. I urge you to contact your Congressional delegation before we lose more ground in our battle to control these serious threats to the Great Lakes ecosystem.

At the same time that non-native species are gaining a foothold, we are losing wetlands and other coastal habitats for native plant and animal species. That's a double whammy—native species are losing their homes and facing new competition for food sources from invasive species, all at the same time.

Erosion along tributary streams is causing increased sedimentation, further changing habitats and impairing the recreational uses of our rivers. Carried along with that sediment are farm chemicals that are increasingly a primary cause of water quality problems, together with urban storm water.

I know that as mayors you are especially concerned about the state of our beaches. In spite of extensive efforts in all the Great Lakes states to improve sewage treatment and limit phosphorus, beach closings remain a vexing problem. U.S. EPA recently began a research project in the Cleveland area into a new “early warning” system that can identify unhealthy conditions sooner. But the real solution is not better information about when to close the beach, it’s not having to close the beach in the first place! And bacteria problems are only part of the story. Beaches and coastal properties are being lost to erosion, and the lack of adequate public access to the lakes denies the region's residents opportunities for recreation.

In Lake Erie, we must also deal with the disturbing recurrence of anoxia, an oxygen-starved region in the Central Basin that has been called "The Dead Zone." There's a Stephen King novel by that name, but believe me, the challenges facing our Great Lakes are scarier than any fictional horror story. Congress should act now to reauthorize the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act of 1998, which expired

in 2001, and appropriate its \$2 million for assessment of harmful algal blooms on the Great Lakes.

Certainly, all levels of government in the region have been working to address these threats and so many others. The U.S. and Canadian governments, the Great Lakes States and Provinces, the communities of the region, and the people who live and work nearest the Great Lakes have been pursuing corrective measures. But valuable as such efforts are, they are only a piece of the overall puzzle. We aren't going to get big things done without more coordinated action. It will be the Governors, the Premiers and the Mayors, together with the federal governments and the private sector, who will jointly make restoration and protection a regional reality.

As Chairman of the Council of Great Lakes Governors, I have challenged my colleagues to embrace an ambitious vision and agenda for the Lakes. We have embarked on the Great Lakes Priorities Project. With me today are three key staff people leading that initiative. I want to thank them for their efforts to date and to make sure you know who they are so that you can feel free to call on them at any time as we work together through this project.

Chris Jones, my Director of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency is chairing the Council's project on my behalf. Kate Barter, my executive assistant for the environment is my personal link to all of the Council projects and David Naftzger, is the newly appointed executive director of the Council of Great Lakes Governors.

Our goal is to define the region's priorities for protection and restoration of the Lakes, to set a path for making those priorities a reality, and to obtain the substantial

federal funding necessary to move us down that path. I am pleased to say that we're making progress toward that goal.

On October 1, the eight Great Lakes Governors, in consultation with the two Great Lakes premiers, jointly released these nine priorities for the region's ecosystem:

- Ensure the sustainable use of our water resources while confirming that the States retain authority over water use and diversions of Great Lakes waters.
- Promote programs to protect human health against adverse effects of pollution in the Great Lakes ecosystem.
- Control pollution from diffuse sources into water, land and air.
- Continue to reduce the introduction of persistent bio-accumulative toxics into the Great Lakes ecosystem.
- Stop the introduction and spread of non-native aquatic invasive species.
- Enhance fish and wildlife by restoring and protecting coastal wetlands and wildlife habitats.
- Restore to environmental health the Areas of Concern identified by the International Joint Commission as needing remediation.
- Standardize and enhance the methods by which information is collected, recorded and shared within the region.
- Adopt sustainable use practices that protect environmental resources and may enhance the recreational and commercial value of our Great Lakes.

Over the next few months, we are undertaking a widespread public discussion of these priorities in partnership with the Great Lakes Commission. There will be public meetings throughout the region at which we will be seeking feedback on the priorities we've identified, and ideas on implementation strategies to bring them to fruition.

As mayors of the communities where the work will be done and the impact will be most directly felt, I urge you to play an active role in these meetings. Our priorities must align with your priorities if we are to succeed.

Already we are working to achieve the first priority—sustainable use of water resources—through the Annex 2001 to the Great Lakes Charter. In the Annex, the Great Lakes Governors and Premiers have called for development of a standard for management of waters in the Great Lakes Basin and a scientifically based method for implementing that standard. Annex 2001 was borne out of the recognition that demand for Great Lakes water is only going to grow in the future. As Governors, we felt compelled to act before the crisis hits. We need to ensure that when other thirsty regions look toward the Great Lakes to solve their problems, we have strong legal authority in place to protect this irreplaceable resource. In part, this means improving our own stewardship over the use of Great Lakes water.

Our goal is to have drafted the necessary basin-wide binding agreements by mid-2004. We've been meeting regularly here in Chicago, and I'm pleased to say that Dave Ullrich, your executive director, has become an active participant in presenting the views of the Mayors!

As we look to funding for the overall Great Lakes Priorities Project, two bills are pending in Congress that would go a long way toward supplying the necessary federal support. I was pleased to see the November 6 Mayors' letter to members of Congress echoing this sentiment and commending the leadership of the bill's sponsors.

As you know, Senator Mike DeWine and Senator Carl Levin are the primary sponsors of the Senate bill, while Illinois Congressman Rahm Emanuel introduced the House bill. I am very pleased that the Congressman has joined us today, along with his Illinois colleague Congressman Mark Kirk, who is also leading the effort in the House to

pass a Great Lakes Restoration bill. I'm sure all of you join me in thanking both Congressman Emanuel and Congressman Kirk for their leadership on this important issue.

The pending bills would provide up to \$6 billion for Great Lakes restoration projects. While that is a lot of money, there is clearly a need for such investment. Beyond dollars, there is a need for better coordination of our ongoing efforts—at all levels—and I welcome the provisions of these bills that work towards that goal!

In particular, I believe that the concept of an overarching advisory board, an element of both bills, will improve coordination among the many entities that do good work for the Great Lakes. Certainly the cities are a key component. It is imperative that the region's mayors have a seat at the table as restoration objectives are prioritized and funding decisions are made.

So much of the work of implementation will fall to those who live and work closest to the Lakes. I can assure you that I will work to ensure that the mayors have a partnership role. And I ask for your help in working with your representatives in Congress for passage of a Great Lakes restoration bill and the funding associated with it. The Council of Great Lakes Governors will soon be providing a list of short-term funding priorities to ensure that we don't lose momentum while we are working through the legislative process. But I don't want to leave the impression that we expect the federal government to pick up the entire tab. That is far from the case, even today.

A recent report by the General Accounting Office detailed the ways in which states and cities are spending dollars on Great Lakes activities that exceed the current

investment by the federal government. The Council of Great Lakes Governors is working on a comprehensive roster detailing that spending, to help demonstrate to Congress that passage of a Great Lakes Restoration bill will supplement - not supplant - what we are already doing.

Fortunately, the stars are aligning for an all-out, coordinated effort to secure the environmental well being of our lake and coastal resources. The Great Lakes Governors and Premiers have articulated clear priorities to restore what is damaged and protect what is viable. The Great Lakes Congressional delegation has put on the table a legislative plan to fund implementation of those priorities within this decade. As the region's mayors and community leaders, you have organized this group to support restoration, recognizing that the quality of life in our communities is inextricably linked to the quality of our Great Lakes.

While the challenges are great, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet them together! Individually, we have accepted our responsibility for the Lakes. The question now is whether we will coalesce into a strong regional voice that can succeed in making the Great Lakes a national priority. I see momentum toward that end. We must seize it. We must advance our agenda. We must do it now.

I have called on President Bush to add his voice to those calling for passage of legislation to restore the Great Lakes. The broad bi-partisan sponsorship of the House and Senate bills, together with the bipartisan membership of this group of Great Lakes mayors, reflects the fact that Great Lakes preservation is an issue with wide appeal, an

issue that addresses issues of public health, conservation, economic stability, and quality of life.

The Great Lakes are a global treasure. They contain 20 percent of the fresh surface water in the world, and 95 percent of the fresh surface water in the United States. Water is irreplaceable. There is no other ecosystem like the Great Lakes. If we believe as a nation in environmental protection, we must protect the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes are an economic engine that drives the national economy. They are a passageway through which American goods reach the global marketplace. The Lakes and their tributaries are a hub of business and industry. The Great Lakes provide recreational resources enjoyed by Americans, Canadians, and people from across the globe. For Ohio alone, Lake Erie tourism is a \$7 billion business, supporting more than a quarter-million jobs.

We hold a great treasure in trust for our children and grandchildren. To the extent that it has been damaged, we must restore it. Where it retains its original value, we must preserve it. We can enjoy this precious resource today, even while acting in concert to safeguard the ecosystem for future generations.

I look forward to working with all of you. Thank you.