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Cities Initiative Applauds U.S. Federal Investment in Great Lakes Calls on Canadian Federal Government to Follow Suit

(March 4, 2009) -- The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative applauds the recent steps by President Barack Obama and Congress to invest in the Great Lakes, the economic and natural resource foundation for a large part of the United States and Canada. These include the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed by Congress and the President's 2010 budget provisions, which include \$475 million for the Great Lakes and large increases for water infrastructure.

"We have been working hard to get Washington to understand how vital the Great Lakes are to the quality of life and economic well being of tens of millions of people," said Mayor Richard M. Daley, Mayor of Chicago and Founding U.S. Chair of the Cities Initiative. "These investments will not only go a long way towards protecting and restoring this important natural resource, but will also put people back to work and spur economic development."

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will provide \$6 billion in water and wastewater infrastructure money, over 30% of which is likely to come to the Great Lakes region. This funding begins the process of reducing the \$70 billion plus wastewater infrastructure deficit estimated by U.S. EPA.

Mayor George Heartwell of Grand Rapids, Vice Chair of the Cities Initiative added, "Local governments along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence have been investing over \$15 billion annually to protect and restore the resource, and it is good to see the Federal government finally increasing its commitment."

The President's Budget for 2010 includes \$475 million for the Great Lakes specifically, and increases the funding for water infrastructure nationally to \$3.9 billion. The funding for the Great Lakes would be by far the largest amount ever dedicated to this global freshwater resource. The Great Lakes funding is designed to help implement the 2005 Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy. Included would be work on invasive species, non-point source pollution, and contaminated sediments. The Cities Initiative plans to work with federal, state, and tribal representatives to steer the funding to those areas most needing attention and where it can do the most good for the resource.

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Lynn Peterson, Mayor of Thunder Bay, Chair

Richard M. Daley, Mayor of Chicago, Founding United States Chair

David Miller, Mayor of Toronto, Founding Canadian Chair



"President Obama has made a clear commitment to the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes," said Toronto Mayor David Miller, Canadian Founding Chair of the Cities Initiative. "While Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2009 budget makes headway on investments in infrastructure, it does not provide the direct funding needed to safeguard the future of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River."

Mayors from the Cities Initiative are calling on Canada's federal government to strengthen its investment in these life-sustaining natural resources to ensure progress is made on both sides of the border.

"It was promising that President Obama's first international trip was to Canada to meet with Prime Minister Harper," said Mayor Lynn Peterson, Mayor of Thunder Bay and current Cities Initiative Chair. "It is my hope that the leaders of our two countries begin a dialogue specifically about the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. This vital freshwater system must be a national priority for both countries."

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