

March 18, 2009 - Slaughter Testifies Before House Budget Committee In Support of Great Lakes Funding

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

Rep. Slaughter Testifies Before
House Budget Committee In Support of Great Lakes
Funding

Washington, DC - Congresswoman
Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chair of the House Committee on Rules and
Co-Chair of the Great Lakes Task Force, today testified before the House Budget
Committee in support of including \$475 million federal dollars for the Great Lakes in the fiscal year 2010 budget.

The text of Congresswoman Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, follows.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss an issue of great importance not only to communities like mine that border the Great Lakes but to our country as well.

As a Co-Chair of the Congressional Great Lakes Task Force, I am here to discuss critical funding for the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes.

Lakes Erie, Huron, Michigan, Ontario and Superior contain more than 18 percent of the world's, and more than 90 percent of North America's, fresh surface water. Combined, they supply drinking water to more than 35 million people.

What's more, millions of people benefit from the commerce and business that depend on the waters of the Great Lakes.

The Lakes are not only a prized natural resource, but also a significant economic engine for our country.

This Committee has the opportunity to create jobs, revive many regional economies, and bolster communities, businesses and industries by funding the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes.

The Brookings Institution released a report in 2007 which found that a \$26 billion investment to restore the Great Lakes would create \$50 billion in economic gains for the region, a two-to-one return on investment.

That is a net gain of at least \$24 billion from increases in tourism, the fishing industry, recreational activity and home values.

Restoring the lakes will also put people to work immediately.

The recommendation to fix old sewers in the region-\$7.65 billion in federal investment-will create at least 265,000 jobs, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

We must protect the Great Lakes in order to ensure that we, and future generations, continue to reap its many benefits.

Every day, the Lakes are threatened by serious environmental problems such as sewage contamination and invasive species.

More than 24 billion gallons of sewage contaminate the Lakes every year, closing beaches and threatening public health.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that we must invest \$390 billion to fix old sewers to prevent combined sewer overflows and storm sewer overflows-many of which occur in the Great Lakes and Northeast regions of the country.

New York alone needs \$36.2 billion over the next twenty years to repair failing infrastructure that leads to billions of gallons of sewage in New York waterways every year.

Moreover, non-native aquatic invasive species continue to wreak havoc on our economy and way of life.

A new non-native aquatic invasive species is discovered in the Lakes every 28 weeks. Invasive species like the zebra mussel cause more than \$200 million in damage and control costs to people, cities, industry and businesses.

The Coast Guard Reauthorization Act, which passed the House last April and stalled in the Senate, was a first step to creating a strong ballast water management program.

This program sets a tough new standard for treating ballast water discharges, finally closes the "No Ballast on Board" loophole, and sets a goal of getting treatment on board vessels as quickly as possible.

Unless action is taken, these problems will get worse, and the solutions will cost more.

To underscore that point, leading scientists released a report in 2005 that found the cumulative impact of these threats is pushing the Lakes toward a tipping point.

In short, deterioration of the ecosystem is accelerating dramatically, and if not addressed now, the damage could be irreversible.

Unfortunately, federal efforts to restore the Lakes have not kept pace with the threats to the Lakes.

A 2002 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that efforts to restore the Great Lakes have been stymied by a lack of coordination and a clear strategy.

The report also indicated that lack of funding hampered clean-up efforts.

The report recommended that the EPA Administrator charge EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office with developing an overarching Great Lakes strategy, submitting a proposal to Congress for funding the plan, and developing a way to measure progress.

In 2005, federal leaders took a major step forward in the effort to restore the Great Lakes when the EPA spearheaded a broad stakeholder process to craft a multi-year plan to restore this great national resource.

More than 1,500 stakeholders participated in the one-year effort, representing industry, business, state and local government, tribes, advocacy organizations, and state and federal agencies.

The result was the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes.

In the Great Lakes region, chambers of commerce, mayors, governors, industry and non-governmental organizations, have united behind a plan -and for good reason: Great Lakes restoration is an economic driver and key to the economic recovery of the region and our nation.

I commend President Barack Obama for recognizing the urgent need to restore the Great Lakes and the tremendous economic benefit healthy Lakes will bring to communities, businesses and industries. I applaud him for including \$475 million to restore the Lakes in his proposed fiscal year 2010 budget.

These federal dollars
represent the most serious commitment to Great Lakes
restoration ever by a President.

This is new money for
some of the most successful and important Great Lakes
restoration efforts, like the Great Lakes Legacy Act. This commitment is a
serious down payment on the multi-year effort to restore the Lakes.

I respectfully request
that you include \$475 million for Great Lakes
restoration and economic recovery.

Thank you for your time.

###