

Oct 31 2005 - Slaughter Responds to Administration Retreat from Commitment to Great Lakes Region

Slaughter Responds to Administration Retreat from Commitment to Great Lakes Region

Rejects Federal Opposition to Allocating New and Necessary Funding for Needed Projects

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee and Co-Chair of the Congressional Great Lakes Task Force, today released the following statement in response to a recent inter-agency memo suggesting that the \$20 billion in funding needed to achieve the goals set forth by the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration may not be forthcoming:

"I am both disappointed and angered by the Bush Administration's failure to live up to its previous commitment to restoring the ecosystems of Great Lakes. Its suggestion that tens of millions of citizens confront unprecedented problems without being given the federal resources they need reveals a lack of appreciation for the significance of this major challenge, as well as a lack of respect for an entire region."

"The Great Lakes touch states from New York to Minnesota. They are relied upon by twenty-eight million Americans and thousands of farms and businesses. By refusing to allocate new funding needed to confront invasive species, repair damaged ecosystems, and address the pollution problems threatening these vital resources, the Administration and the agencies under its charge are turning their backs on one of our nation's national treasures.

Excuses have been made, budget constraints having been cited as the reason why these projects cannot go forward. But while it is true that the mistaken priorities of this Administration have driven our nation into historic debt, our environmental health shouldn't be asked to bear the brunt of the President's lack of vision.

I and my fellow citizens of the Great Lakes region call upon the Bush Administration to do everything in its power to live up to its word. The suggestions of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration are bold and valuable, and will produce tremendous benefits for our country. We should embrace and fund them fully, not struggle to find ways to avoid our responsibility to fix problems that demand, and deserve, solutions."

BACKGROUND

President Bush announced the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration in May, 2004 as a partnership of state, local, and tribal representatives, key Great Lakes organizations, and a variety of stakeholders. This partnership was presented with the historic opportunity to study the needs of the Great Lakes and submit a comprehensive strategy for Great Lakes restoration to the President by December.

But a recent report issued by the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, a group composed of ten agency and Cabinet officers who hold power over more than 140 Great Lakes programs, indicates that those working to improve the Great Lakes region should look to work within current budget constraints, rather than counting on additional federal funding to further their efforts. Members of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, as well as environmental advocates like the National Wildlife Federation, have already stated that new funding is needed if proposed plans have any chance of being completed.