

(June 26, 2006) Congressman Lipinski's Statement on The Great Lakes Water Protection Act of 2006

The Great Lakes Water Protection Act of 2006

Statement of Representative Daniel Lipinski (IL-3)

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Good morning, I am pleased to be here with Congressman Kirk, Mr. Lanyon, Mr. Davis, and Mr. O'Sullivan to talk about one of the most important issues for Illinois and all of America - preserving the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are the largest freshwater system in the world and hold 90% of the fresh water in the United States. In Illinois and the seven other surrounding states, we depend upon the Great Lakes for everything from fresh drinking water to recreation, tourism, and the \$4.1 billion fishing industry. The Great Lakes are critical to our lives and our economy - we cannot sit idly by and watch this precious resource be destroyed by the dumping of raw sewage.

For me personally, the Great Lakes have always been an important part of my life. Growing up, I remember summers spent on the beaches of Lake Michigan and riding my bike along the lakefront. When I went to Northwestern for college, being near the lake was a great attraction for me.

But as a society, we have taken the Great Lakes for granted, assuming they will always be here for us to use and to enjoy. In reality, though, contamination from sewage dumping is threatening our lakes. Older water infrastructure systems are overwhelmed during heavy rain storms, and untreated, raw sewage often pours into the Great Lakes and surrounding waterways. This sewage, which contains harmful bacteria like E. coli, contaminates drinking water and causes health problems resulting in beach closures. Annually, the EPA estimates that between 1.8 and 3.5 million people in the U.S. get sick from water polluted by sewage. More than 1,800 beaches on the Great Lakes experienced advisories or closings in 2003 - up 32 percent from 2002! In Illinois alone, we had almost 800 beach closings along Lake Michigan in 2004, more than five times the number of closings in 2001. While some of this increase is due to improved monitoring, we must do more to ensure that our beaches are safe.

The Great Lakes Water Protection Act will help us greatly improve the quality of our water and safety of our beaches by ending the dumping of raw sewage by 2026. By greatly increasing the fines for cities that release untreated sewage into the Great Lakes - up to \$100,000 per day per violation - we will make the water cleaner. This legislation will also help us repair past damage by reinvesting the funds back into the states where the violations occurred. This money will help improve habitat quality, clean up beaches, and insure a healthier environment for both humans and wildlife.

In the Chicago area, we have already made great strides in decreasing the amount of sewage that is released. I would like to thank the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District and the City of Chicago for their work over the last quarter century in addressing this problem, specifically with the Deep Tunnel project. In May, I was at the grand opening of the final part of the Deep Tunnel, a 30 year, 3 billion dollar project. The Deep Tunnel has reinvigorated our waterways by preventing the dumping of untreated sewage during heavy rainstorms, in addition to keeping the water out of so many basements in the area. The results have been dramatic. Wildlife has returned to our waters, property values have increased, and tourism and recreation have improved. Families can now safely enjoy these waters.

The City of Chicago and MWRD have worked hard to protect this vital resource. The Great Lakes Water Protection Act will help ensure that other communities in the region are meeting similar standards, and will make the Great Lakes region an even better place to live and work.