
(July 5, 2007) The Great Lakes Water Protection Act of 2007

OPENING STATEMENT

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Member, U.S. House of Representatives

STATEMENT: H.R. 2907, The Great Lakes Water Protection Act of 2007

July 5, 2007

Good morning, I am pleased to be here with Congressman Kirk to talk about one of the most important issues for everyone in Chicagoland and America - cleaning up the Great Lakes.

Our location at the Shedd Aquarium offers a great opportunity to enjoy Lake Michigan, just as many of us here have done so often. But the lakes are more than their aesthetic beauty. 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.

We have made great strides in improving water quality in the Great Lakes, but as we look upon the lake today, there is an alarming trend that belies the beauty we see. In 2005 alone, there were 316 beach closings and health advisory days at Chicago's 23 beaches, a 139 percent jump from the previous year. Great Lakes beaches in America had over 2,700 days of closings and advisories that year - up 48 percent. Why is this happening? One simple answer - the dumping of raw sewage.

Old wastewater treatment plants with antiquated infrastructure are overwhelmed during heavy rain storms, resulting in untreated, raw sewage pouring into the Great Lakes and surrounding waterways. Sewage with harmful bacteria such as E. coli can contaminate drinking water and have a serious health impact on anyone who enters the lake. Annually, the EPA estimates that between 1.8 and 3.5 million Americans get sick from water polluted by sewage.

We must end the dumping of raw sewage into our Great Lakes. It is disgusting, harmful, and just plain wrong. Those who are dumping must stop doing it or be held accountable. And only the federal government can do this.

That is why I joined Mark Kirk in introducing the Great Lakes Water Protection Act. This bill will help us greatly improve the quality of our water and safety on our beaches by imposing stiff fines on those who dump sewage. Currently, the fines are only \$25,000 per violation per day. This bill would increase the fines fourfold to \$100,000. And the fines will not only act as a deterrent, but they will also help improve water quality by reinvesting the penalties collected into a new Clean Water State Revolving Fund that will pay for infrastructure improvements that will prevent future dumping.

As a member of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, I know that the key to stopping sewage dumping

is to provide the needed infrastructure. Since I joined the committee this year we have passed legislation to finally provide the necessary federal aid for infrastructure for wastewater treatment, pollution control, and watershed management. I will continue to work hard on the committee to protect our Great Lakes.

In the Chicago area, we have already made great strides in decreasing the amount of sewage that is released. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District and the City of Chicago have worked for more than a quarter of a century on TARP, more commonly known as the Deep Tunnel. I am working with Representative Kirk and the entire delegation to continue securing federal funding for this project. It is time for other communities in the region to make similar advances, and this bill will make sure they do it.

The Great Lakes Water Protection Act represents a strong, bipartisan step forward to continue the progress we have made in cleaning up the Great Lakes and will help ensure continued improvements for years to come. Pollution is not partisan and it knows no geographic boundaries between countries, between states, between cities, or between congressional districts. That is why we must all work together to counter this great threat.