

Remarks from David Ullrich
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
At the Lake Erie Areas of Concern Summit

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Thank you very much Lori. As usual you are far too kind. When you mentioned the alphabet soup I couldn't help but think of the little exchange we had in the lunch line when she talked about driving up to Georgian Bay and going by the IGA. And thought "now wait a minute, isn't it IAG, Intergovernmental", and no! It was the food store." I think the 33 years I've been working in government and the environmental business maybe is far too long. But, as all of you know out there, this is not for the faint of heart or the weak of soul. This is a long hard business and again, looking around the room and seeing people like Carl and Jim, I know Sandy Binn is out there right now . . . There's Sandy. She saw me my first week on the job managing the Resource Conservation Recovery Act program and gave me a good piece of her mind. Got me off on the right track. I just wanted to say how much I admire all of the people in this room and the work that you have done. The level of energy and enthusiasm I saw at the end of this morning's session is truly impressive and I know you've been at it for a long time because I've been working with many of you for that period of time.

Again, this is what it takes to do this kind of work. If you look, since 1970 the starting point for a lot of this activity, a tremendous amount of progress has been made. As I heard in the discussion before, it isn't dramatic - overnight. There are the little marks on the wall and you can't see the Cuyahoga overnight all of a sudden being a trout stream or even Lake Erie overnight being the great walleye fishery in the world, but that's what's happening with many of our resources and it's the kind of commitment of the type of people in this room to make that happen, and I just have absolutely the greatest admiration for everyone here.

It's great to be in the Tom Ridge Environmental Center. Lori's has told me much about this for quite some time. It's even better than she said. These are important things. I've heard several people a little distressed about the fact that the environmental issue isn't the hot priority like it used to be. We've moved into another phase. But really investments like this and centers like this help keep the environmental issue in the public eye. I think it's important to recognize when that type of thing is done, so it's great to be here and be part of this event.

One of the things about the Great Lakes is that we go to a lot of meetings. There was a story going around a couple years ago that that's all we do. Then we get on a bus and go to the next meeting and then we meet and then we go to the next meeting. I know that isn't totally true, it just seems that there are a lot of meetings. What I would recommend, and I know you are going to do some work on this this afternoon, is to come out of here with at least one good idea, that either later this afternoon or tomorrow morning, you will do business differently from what you did before you came here.

Now it looks like there is a potential long list of many things that you are going to sift and winnow through and come up with some of the best ideas. But the important thing is to leave with some new and fresh ideas about how to do things better because there always can be improvements. I think one of the ways we've gone wrong in the past is we try to do too much at once. Obviously, if you go out and try to do all of these tomorrow, you won't get through the list. But if you pick one that's do-able and has a lot of promise, I can almost guarantee that it will make a big difference and make coming to things like this even more worthwhile.

What I'd like to do today is cover four areas. I'm going to tell you a little bit more about that Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. Secondly, I'm going to talk a little bit about why I think local government is important is protecting and restoring the Great Lakes and I will very frequently say and St. Lawrence because I think its part of the same ecosystem and its an important element of our organization. Thirdly, I'd like to

talk a little bit about what I think local government can bring to the table and then finally, just few suggestions on steps that collectively we all can take to help accelerate that Area of Concern process.

As of this Friday, it will be officially three years that I've been a representative of mayors and local government and before that I was a Fed for thirty years one month and thirteen days, never counting but it's taken a little time to go native. The thing that I want to do is make sure that local government, at least the ones I work with, can be a very positive presence in this whole process.

As I'm told, and this was still when I was back in the hallowed halls of Region 5 at 77 W. Jackson, Mayor Daley called a group of about 15 or 20 mayors together in I think the Hancock Building in Chicago in November of 2002. For those of you who haven't had much of an opportunity to hear Mayor Daley speak or interact with him, he's a pretty straight forward guy.

You pretty much know where he's coming from. As I understand it, he basically said "listen, we look out from the Hancock Building over this lake, we have a beautiful lake out here. This is really important to us as cities and will be important in the future. There are serious problems with the lakes. We know that we are part of those problems, but nobody is asking what we think are some of the solutions to those problems."

Now as is characteristic of Mayor Daily, he does not wait around for an invitation to come and speak his mind. So he said he said 'well, what about putting together a little organization and we get more involved in these things.' Well, one thing lead to another and as of July 14, 2003 we opened the doors off the Great Lakes Cities Initiative. I was ten days out of retirement at that point. I failed retirement in a very quick time period. There was some poetry in this, my first day of retirement was Independence Day, July 4 officially, and my first day with this job was July 14, Bastille Day which we don't celebrate here, but there is a certain spirit of that in our work.

There were three themes for this group of mayors and other local leaders. First of all, we wanted seats at Great Lakes and St. Lawrence decisions making tables; secondly we wanted to make sure that best practices, much as you are sharing with one another here, are shared among the many cities that are doing good and exciting things around the Great Lakes; and thirdly, we wanted to be real advocates and champions of protection and restoration of the Great Lakes.

We have somewhere between 80 and 90 participating cities to one degree or another. It's about and even split between U.S. and Canadian cities. Actually, more recently, Canadian cities have been a little more involved than some of the U.S. cities. We have a sixteen member board of directors, again, an even split between U.S. and Canada. Mayor Sinnott of Erie is one of our members of the board of directors. Currently Mayor David Miller of Toronto is our Chairman. Mayor Daily had served as our founding Chairman and will continue as founding Chair, but David Miller of Toronto will be leading our efforts in this coming year.

Just last May we merged the Great Lakes Cities Initiative with a previously existing organization called the International Association of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Mayors. Part of it was the name was too long, so we had to shorten that a little bit. That was primarily a Canadian group that had been around since the late 80's early '90s. It had a little bit more focus on the shipping issues and not as much of an environmental focus. The idea was to bring the two groups together. We didn't need two mayoral organizations. We put them into one and we were able to lengthen the Great Lakes Cities Initiative name a little bit and shorten the other one a little bit so that's why we've got Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. Part of it is we very strongly believe that the St. Lawrence is key part of the Great Lakes ecosystem and second, and particularly on the Canadian side, making sure that the problems of Québec and their important cities are part of this effort. They have been a major contributing force..

As Lori mentioned, we have been able to establish ourselves relatively quickly, we hope as a positive presence at many of the Great Lakes decision making tables. I think as all of you know, there are quite a few of them, so I won't go through the list on that.

Next I want to talk a little bit about why local government is important in all this. Very honestly, I had some questions in my own mind before moving in to this position about another organization getting involved in Great Lakes matters because we have so many already. I really decided myself that this was a key element and that we only should be at the table if we could be a positive presence and bring fresh and new ideas and really help overall to advance the cause. I guess only time and history will ultimately judge, but I think we are off to a pretty good start.

I think that there are particularly important things about the local government perspective, and many of you in this room operate at the local as opposed to the state provincial or federal level, and have a better sense of local political dynamics and organizational dynamics than perhaps others. I hope that some of this will resonate with you.

It really strikes me that a real advantage to local government has is the proximity to the resource itself, to the issues, and perhaps most importantly, the people. When a mayor has to go to work in the morning or leave at the end of the day or go out to lunch and I've spent a fair amount of time with a lot of these mayors and you walk down the street and . . . "Hello mayor." "Hello mayor." "The beaches are closed today. What are you doing about it?" Whoever is the closest person, they will often raise that, they generally don't call Washington, or maybe they do sometimes, or they don't call the state; they see the mayor and they ask the mayor "What about that?"

That proximity; I think in terms of understanding the resource, understanding the issues perhaps not at as deep a technical level as many people in this room understand it, but still understanding it. Most importantly understanding the people and the dynamics of the community I think put local elected officials in an excellent position to be involved and to be a positive presence.

There is a certain sense of urgency that comes along with this. I didn't have that as much at a federal level as I think is necessary at the local level because of the immediacy of things that must be dealt with. I know Mark Kwitowski back there in the room, who I've working with over the last three years, does an excellent job of running the sewage treatment plant here, has to deal with things on a very, very immediate basis. If there is going to be a heavy rainfall or something, and thank goodness, here he is doing an excellent job of separating the sewers and managing storm water. But being on the front line like that, there really is no substitute for that. The kinds of practical solutions and the orientation toward action and results is important particularly in the RAP and AOC context . . . these are the types of things that I think local government can bring. The accountability goes along with that as well. We've got some very interesting discussions in the International Joint Commission context about accountability under the Water Quality Agreement. Again, I think that is something the local government can bring.

In addition, the local entities were there before, they are there now and they will be there in the future. They must live with the current conditions, as long as they stay current, and with whatever is done in the future. So these are the types of things that I do think the local elected leaders, mayors, township chairs, the county commissioners, whatever; can bring to the table.

What can cities do to help in the RAP process? I'm going to make a very revolutionary proposal right now. I've shared this with no one, I don't have any of the official endorsement from my board of directors to do this; but I think we need to make a fundamental change in how we look at AOCs and RAPs. My proposal is that from today on, we all talk about RAPID --- Remedial Action Plan and Implementation, darnit! What I'm suggesting is that we don't just stop at remedial action plans, and I do know there is implementation built into that, but I would think that from today on and forward we should be talking about remedial action plans and implementation... RAPID. I do think a greater sense of speed and urgency and moving forward is important.. I'm not sure its going to catch on, I think I've got Joel Weiner on the social marketing side. He might make it. This is what I think really brought this down a lot with the RAPs and the LaMPS, honestly is that I think we viewed it too much as a continuing planning process and we didn't have enough either psychological or financial and other emphasis on the implementation stages. That is my proposal for what we might do and we'll see if it can make a difference.

Obviously, money has always been an issue. It always was and it always will be. The issue is how we can use what we get more effectively. I think we need to continue our efforts to make more money available, but we have to continue to strive to use what we get much more effectively.

The other thing, this is kind of the M & M problem, I think money and management are the two biggest issues that we are dealing with. It is very difficult type of process, the RAPID and AOC process is a very difficult type of thing to manage but I think there are some things that can be done to improve it and I'll mention just a couple of those.

A second thing that I think local government could do to help is in educating mayors about the Water Quality Agreement, about what it means to be an Area of Concern and about the RAPID process. Mayors are good, smart people but they don't have the time to sit down and go through the history of the Water Quality Agreement. We need to provide enough information to make sure they understand the implications of this so they can participate more effectively. Mayors need to get more involved and one of the things I want to work with our group with all the mayors in area of concerns. I know there will be some hesitation about this. I was a career civil servant type and I always got a little nervous when things got more political. But we have to face the reality that much of what we do does have political implications. Mayors are kind of a unique political force and I think could be a very positive presence in this whole process. I think the first step of education and then a second step of getting more involved and then I would hope that in each one of the areas of concern at least the major city if not additional cities in the area, the mayor would number one, designate a lead person who's clearly responsible for being engaged in the community action group or whatever, and secondly, that type of person really had a direct line to the mayor to keep the mayor advised of what is happening on this. Depending on the stage of activity, the size of the area of concern and the complexity - it may require somebody full time. If the mayors can get more engaged they can be a positive presence.

People were talking earlier about the environment not being a high enough priority issue in the areas and that perhaps there wasn't a degree of understanding. I think mayors can be opinion leaders and educators of the public. If a mayor starts talking about something, it becomes a priority. It will get covered in the news and that does help raise the visibility. Secondly, mayors can educate the public about these things.

These are things that if we empower mayors and other local elected officials, they can do some of the things that you are recognizing that need to be done.

First, mayors are very good at putting pressure on different people and places to get things done. They can do it internally within their own organization. They have very high expectations for people. Mayors put pressure on their staff.

Secondly, mayors can do this with business in terms of getting them to the table and getting more involved in whatever.

Third - working with others elected officials particularly state representatives is important.

Finally - at the federal level with the local congressman - what a mayor has to say to a local congressman is important.

I think they can help find money as well from different sources. Not necessarily their own coffers, but other coffers.

Another thing that was mentioned this morning was the importance of celebrating success. These are things that mayors like to do. They like to be attached with successful things and get more visibility for them.

Other steps that I would suggest obviously, we will always need more money and we will never have as much as we truly need.

I think we've done pretty well under the Great Lakes Legacy Act and I do take my hat off to GLNPO and all the hard work they've done and Dave Cowgill in particular dealing with some OMB issues and other things. That money is getting out and it is working. Three projects that have been completed, another three are underway and several are in the waiting line. That whole issue of being ready to spend money is particularly important under the Legacy Act and being able to demonstrate that you're ready to spend it and that you can demonstrate that it's being spent well is critically important. I think that things are set up in a good way so that Great Lakes Legacy Act, we have Congressman Ehlers and many others from the Great Lakes Delegation to thank for that, is really positioned where we can go back and continue to argue - we're at the \$27 - 28 million range and maybe get up to the 50 million a year range.

The State Revolving Fund is getting hammered year after year and its getting hit hard again this year. That's critically important to cities for dealing with the CSO and SSO problems. That is something we've got to work on.

Finding other sources of federal, state and local money, making more creative use of Superfund are important. I know Carl doesn't like to hear Superfund necessarily in the Ashtabula context, but we wouldn't be getting anywhere on the Fox River in Wisconsin without the Superfund authorities and money that's been put forth there.

Integrating these various federal and state programs is important.

Enforcement settlement money is critically important on the Great Calumet River in northwest Indiana.

And then we've got to get more innovative in financing. I'm not going to use the term creative because that has some negative connotations. But we can be innovative in finding new ways to finance these projects.

Those are some of the things that can be done. We need to management this process better, the RAPID process. I'm speaking for us at the local level and at the state level, particularly. The number of AOCs for Michigan, fourteen for Michigan. I don't think MDEQ has enough people allocated to this. I still think that GLNPO needs a full time branch level person whose 100% responsibility is AOCs. This is big, it is complex, it requires a lot of attention to really make this happen. I tried to do some things right before I left in 2003 and I was not successful, but I think that needs to be done and we need more management. A lot has been done with little over these years but if we really want to do this it's going to take more of that.

In wrapping up, I think you are doing well. I think we, as cities, can help in this process and that in the future we can do even better and rapidly we will decrease the number of AOC in the future.

Thank you very much for you time and attention.