

Address by Rep. Rahm Emanuel
Great Lakes Congressional Breakfast
Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C.
March 2, 2005

Thanks to the Northeast-Midwest Institute and the Great Lakes Commission for inviting me.

As we begin the 109th Congress it makes sense to review our progress.

In the 108th Tom Reynolds and I introduced the Great Lakes Restoration Act.

This bill was well received and secured the support of 106 members of the House, all eight governors of Great Lakes States, more than 40 mayors of lakefront communities, and 43 advocacy organizations.

Senators Dewine and Levin introduced similar legislation in the Senate that was cosponsored by 15 Senators.

This coalition pushed hard, and we were rewarded by the President's Executive Order creating the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration.

I support the collaboration and look forward to the final report in December.

But another report is not going to solve the Great Lakes' problems.

What the Great Lakes need is money.

They need a significant source of dedicated federal funding.

Unfortunately, it's unlikely that Congress will provide that source of funding until after the collaboration's final report is issued.

We're sort of in a holding pattern.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't keep working, because the reality is that the health of the lakes isn't getting any better.

2003 was yet another record year for beach closings.

No doubt when we have the data, we'll see that in 2004 there were even more closures.

And other problems are surfacing.

For example, last fall the National Wildlife Federation issued a report detailing alarming disruptions in the entire Great Lakes food web.

And invasive species like the Asian Carp continue to threaten the lakes.

The Great Lakes aren't getting better, so we can't just wait.

Instead we should use this opportunity to build support for restoration in the region and here in DC.

Tom Reynolds and I have reintroduced our bill again this year.

So far 53 House members have signed on.

But we should also use this time to take care of some outstanding issues on the Great Lakes.

We should pass the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act, something that is vitally important to the Great Lakes, a region plagued by more than 160 invasive species.

We should work to increase funding levels for programs important to the Great Lakes like the Great Lakes Legacy Act and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

Probably most important, we should give some thought to how we're going to secure the funding that the Great Lakes need.

We have our legislation, but maybe we need to think larger.

Rather than Great Lakes specific legislation, maybe we should combine the efforts of our region with those in other regions, like Louisiana, Florida, and the states around the Chesapeake Bay in an effort to pass a national restoration package, a Great Waters Restoration bill.

By providing significant dedicated resources, every region would get the funding they need to solve their specific problems.

That would be in stark contrast to current events, where no region gets what they need.

It's just an idea. And something I'm exploring. But, if we're going to get a majority of 535 members to sign off on a plan, we're going to need some support from outside the region.

I'll leave you with that.

Before I go, I'd like to introduce the next speaker.

Mayor Daley is the longest serving big-city Mayor in the country.

When it comes to cutting edge ideas for cities, this Mayor did it first.

He has vision and that is why many new Mayors call him for ideas and advice.

Under his leadership, Chicago has flourished, and I am truly amazed by the things he's accomplished.

The Mayor is also a true champion and leader on Great Lakes issues.

He created the Great Lakes Cities Initiative, and worked tirelessly to make sure mayors throughout the region have a seat at the table – and clearly they do.

So without further ado:

My good friend;

the best Mayor of the greatest city;

Mayor Daley.