



**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment**

TESTIMONY OF
The Honorable Gary Becker
Mayor, City of Racine, Wisconsin
and Vice Chair, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

September 13, 2006
Washington, D.C.

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Gary Becker and I am the Mayor of Racine, Wisconsin. I am here today in my capacity as the Vice Chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative ("Cities Initiative"). I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today concerning Great Lakes restoration and protection, and more specifically on how we can work together to implement the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy that was released in December 2005.

The Great Lakes are a resource of tremendous value to the people of our country and Canada, the states and provinces that border the lakes, the tribes and first nations of the area, and the many cities, towns and other local governments in the basin. The Cities Initiative is an organization with over 80 participating cities in equal numbers from the United States and Canada. Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley is the Founding Chair of the Cities Initiative and Toronto Mayor David Miller serves as the current Chair. The goal of the Cities Initiative is to advance water quality, water conservation and waterfront vitality by being an active participant in Great Lakes decision-making, by developing and sharing local best practices, and by being strong advocates for the long-term restoration and protection of the Great Lakes.

Since 2003 when Mayor Daley established the Cities Initiative, we have been actively engaged with the Bush Administration, Great Lakes Governors, Great Lakes Tribal Leaders, Great Lakes business leaders and Great Lakes advocacy groups on Great Lakes issues.

Mayor Daley represents the Cities Initiative on the Executive Committee for the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, the effort launched by the President's May 2004 Executive Order on the Great Lakes. Mayor Daley and I, along with many other mayors, have been actively involved in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration since the effort began and we continue to remain involved as the Collaboration moves forward.

The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy released in December 2005 was the product of the Collaboration. The Strategy represents the most comprehensive statement ever developed about the problems faced on the Great Lakes and what it will take to solve them over the long-term. Equally important, the Strategy represents the *very first consensus strategy from all the relevant stakeholders in the Great Lakes region* about the current and future needs of the Lakes. A consensus strategy is exactly what the Administration and the Congress had asked us to develop.

While the estimated cost to fully implement the Strategy is \$20 billion, Mayors and Governors recognize an expenditure of that magnitude must be spread over a number of years. Accordingly, when the Strategy was released in December 2005, Mayors and Governors asked the President and Congress for an initial investment of \$300 million to focus on the top priorities and address the most urgent problems, such as invasive species, coastal health, areas of concern, toxic pollutants, habitat and species, non-point source pollution, indicators and information, and sustainability. Mayors and Governors committed to meet matching levels for this initial federal investment, which would amount to approximately half of the \$300 million.

In addition, Mayors and Governors requested several other federal steps to help advance the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes, including enactment of comprehensive aquatic invasive species legislation, with a special emphasis on ballast water, and a more streamlined approach to federal wetlands protection.

The Mayors appreciate that some members of Congress have shown interest in moving forward on some aspects of Great Lakes restoration and protection. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing earlier this year on the Regional Collaboration, and we sincerely appreciate that this Subcommittee is taking similar action by holding this hearing. In addition, various members of Congress have pushed hard for action on invasive species legislation, as well as on legislation to ban the Asian carp and legislation to expand the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act.

However, none of this legislation has been enacted and, with the exception of the Legacy Program, no additional Great Lakes funding is on the horizon.

The Mayors are disappointed that there has not been more progress from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the other federal agencies in terms of supporting forward movement on the Regional Collaboration Strategy.

Moreover, the federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, which was established by the President's Executive Order to coordinate federal Great Lakes policy among numerous federal agencies, still has not taken any substantive action. We are also very concerned about other federal actions that are wholly inconsistent with the Strategy, such as the proposal to continue cutting the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which has been slashed in recent years by approximately 50%, or more than \$700 million.

The lack of federal movement has not slowed the momentum of Great Lakes Mayors, or Great Lakes Governors and Tribes in working towards Great Lakes restoration and protection. Great Lakes cities are spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually in capital investments and operating expenses on sewers, treatment plants, stormwater management, water conservation, waterfront parks and many other efforts to restore the Great Lakes. As one example, in my city, we have been working to protect our beaches so that families from Racine can enjoy swimming in Lake Michigan. We have obtained over \$830,000 in grant funds to improve monitoring, identify sources of contamination and improve beach management to reduce water quality advisories and educate the public. We also spent over \$600,000 of our own local money and a \$150,000 grant from Wisconsin to improve stormwater management.

These types of activities are being undertaken in cities all across the Great Lakes as Mayors do our part to increase the value of this natural resource and the enjoyment of our citizens. Mayors want to continue as full partners with federal, state, and tribal governments in the effort to restore and protect the Great Lakes. This effort is critical to our region and to the nation. We are fully engaged with Canadian cities as well, to make sure that the international dimensions of the Great Lakes resource are fully appreciated.

In summary, the Cities Initiative remains strongly committed to its initial request to the President and Congress for a \$300 million investment to begin work towards implementation the highest priority items included in the Strategy. The Cities Initiative also remains committed to working towards passage of comprehensive invasive species legislation and other priority Great Lakes bills consistent with the Strategy.

We have a unique opportunity with the Regional Collaboration Strategy to make a significant departure from "business as usual" towards a consensus approach. The Cities Initiative wants to make sure we do that so future generations will look back with gratitude and say that all levels of government made a positive change for the Great Lakes by working together to restore and protect them.

Thank you for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Contact Information:

Gary Becker, Mayor
City of Racine
730 Washington Avenue
Racine, Wisconsin 53403
262-636-9111



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