

**CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ON THE GREAT LAKES
CONGRESSMAN VERH EHLERS PRESIDING
GRAND RAPIDS, MI
APRIL 21, 2006**

**Hon. George K. Heartwell
Mayor of Grand Rapids, MI**

Good afternoon. Congressman Ehlers and Congressman Emanuel, thank you for affording us the opportunity to provide testimony on the Great Lakes.

My name is George Heartwell. I am Mayor of Grand Rapids and a member of the Board of Directors of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. We are a group of over 85 mayors from the United States and Canada working for the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes. The Honorable Richard Daley of Chicago is Chairman. Mayor Daley sends his regrets that he was unable to attend this hearing and has asked that I speak on behalf of the Initiative.

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative has been extensively involved in development of the Great Lakes Regional Collaborative Strategy. We are signatories to the compact signed on December 3, 2004 in Chicago; and we joined over 200 people working on the strategy right here in Grand Rapids last August. The strategy provides an excellent guide for federal, state, local and tribal governments as well as industry and non-profits on priorities and actions for the Great Lakes.

Two key things are needed at this point:

- **Action**, not more planning, and
- **Funding**

Cities across the basin will be looking to take key actions on such things as reducing sewer overflows, eliminating beach closures, protecting and restoring key habitat and wetlands, helping clean up contaminated areas of concern, encouraging proper disposal of household hazardous waste and mercury, using water more efficiently, and many others.

Mayors and Governors set out priority actions in a December 12, 2005 letter to President Bush (a copy of which I am providing for you today). We are looking expectantly to the Administration and the Congress to proceed swiftly on many of these points. The three I would highlight today are:

1. comprehensive invasive species legislation,
2. funding for water infrastructure, wetland programs, and waterfront revitalization,
3. completing the electronic fish barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to keep Asian Carp out of the Great Lakes.

Congratulations to you gentlemen, Congressman Ehlers and Congressman Emanuel, on the introduction of the “Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act.” It contains many of the things that Mayors and Governors called for in our letter to the President. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative supports this legislations.

We are particularly pleased with the provisions for

- addressing invasive species
- funding wastewater infrastructure
- funding wetlands and habitat protection
- funding for areas of concern under the Great Lakes Legacy Act (a bill sponsored by congressman Ehlers)
- and improving indicators, information and research.

It is essential that we move ahead with restoration now! Investments today can avoid much larger costs and expenditures down the road, as we learned the hard way with Hurricane Katrina. Cities are prepared to do our part. We pledge to work with Congress, Administration, States, Tribes, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to make this happen.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to speak.