

4-18-00
Clean Air for the Adrenaloids

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Moose Lake, New York

April 18, 2000

I thank you so very much for being here with me. Thank you, Major, for your description of what has happened over the last decades but, more than that, for your love and devotion to this lodge and to Big Moose Lake. I thank you and Diane for taking us in and making us all feel so welcome. I want to thank you, too, Bernard, for your leadership. I know that John told me you spend probably more time in Washington now than you wish you had to in order to try to work on these issues but I think that is what it is going to take.

It is a sort of bad news, slightly better news story. The bad news continues as both Margaret and Major shared with us. But the slightly better news is in a kind of odd way that this has now finally become a national problem and just maybe with national leadership and putting together coalitions of people from states that now understand they too are affected -it is not just an Adirondack problem; this is not just a New York problem. This is now a problem that goes from California to Maine to Florida. And it is a problem that we now have studied to death.

We understand what causes it and it would just be a great dereliction of public duty and responsibility if we do not take action. If you look at the work that has been done over the past ten years, and Senator Moynihan had a great deal to do with that, having come to this lake and sat on this porch and taken up the cause of trying to combat acid rain. He was very successful in 1990 in getting the first legislation through that really began to make a difference. But none of us knew then how much more we had to do. And what we now face is building on the progress that was made but trying to accelerate it and broaden it.

You now, for me this issue brings together a lot of concerns that I've had for more than thirty years. I have always loved the outdoors and have visited and hiked and camped in parks from Alaska to the Smokies. And I know from the work I have been able to do the last seven years how critical it is for us to continue to support the Adirondacks and all of our national treasures. But this New York treasure is one that, as Bernard

said, almost defies imagination because it is so much bigger than so many of the places that we know of as being such treasures in the West. And I'm pleased that Sagamore and others are considered American treasures under our State of America Treasures Campaign. But now I hope that Big Moose Lake and all of the other lakes here in the Adirondacks can be saved as well.

This is also an issue that has to do with health. Major (inaudible) talked about how this first came to his attention when his children began suffering and he couldn't find out what the reason was and traced it to the water. I just came from Lewis County and spent some time talking with some people in (Inaudible) and they were telling me about how they are convinced that they, too, have health impact from the kind of air and the acid rain deposition that just as a matter of course is so much a part of the area here in the North Country.

But I'm particularly concerned about children because children are not miniature adults. Their little lungs and their whole systems absorb so much more than those of us who are full-grown and if we were to do it for no other reason we should do it to insure the health of every child who lives here in the Adirondacks and increasingly around the country. And also I am so glad that Bernard made the point that this is a New York City problem as well - that the reservoirs that have for so many years have provided such fine drinking water for the people of New York City are in danger. And I want everyone downstate to understand that this is something that the entire state has to be united around.

Fighting for the causes of cleaner water and cleaner air or healthier forests or healthier lakes or healthier children is one of the reasons I am running for the Senate. I have worked on these issues and have been troubled by our sort of one-step-forward half-a-step-back progress over the last many years. We are about to celebrate Earth Day on Saturday and many of us have seen the progress that we have made but I think have been somewhat disappointed we've not been able to make more. So, we've got to do everything possible to not only bring greater public awareness but to demonstrate the linkages between what we are talking about here and health, the cost of cleaning up drinking water for a huge city like New York as well as the death and decay of beautiful lakes like the one behind us and the continuing deterioration of our

forests.

New Yorkers are now facing a host of environmental challenges from air pollution to ozone smog to acid rain to dying lakes and rivers. You know, tomorrow I will be on the Long Island Sound where mysteriously we've lost the lobster population. It's gone and nobody knows what killed it - what happened to it - one of the, I think it is the third most productive lobster beds in the entire country - and now you've got all these lobster fishermen out of work because there are no lobsters left.

This is an issue that affects every part of our state and, I would argue, every part of our country. More than three-fourths of all New Yorkers live in areas that do not meet the National (inaudible) air quality standards - (inaudible) a shocking statistic. And one would hardly expect that to be the case up here. (Inaudible) when Major talked about it that why would he have any reason to think that his water wasn't safe. What would there be around to pollute it? Well, in fact, nothing that you could see because it was hundreds of miles away.

But there are many other causes of the problems in the air quality that are affecting the majority of New Yorkers. We can see here by testing the water, which both Major and Bernard did today and told me what the count was, so we can see the destruction of the trees and we can know that there are (inaudible) names here in the Adirondacks that no longer reflect what was once so prevalent there. It's been a long time, I'm told, since any trout were caught in Brook Trout Lake and the loons have long since deserted Loon Hollow Pond (inaudible) the only fish that can survive are crawfish. And we could go down - and those of you who guide and hunt and love this area - could tell chapter and verse what has happened.

According to a recent study by the Government Accounting Office, known as the GAO, and the twelve-member crew of the non-profit Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation the current Federal acid rain program will be and is insufficient to stop this damage that acid rain is causing and it will only, at best, slow the pace at which our lakes and reservoirs are dying. That is an unacceptable fact. Before the GAO report everyone thought it would take around forty years before half our lakes would be destroyed. Now we know that will happen

even sooner. Big Moose Lake is just one of the hundreds of Adirondack lakes now too acidic for most fish to survive. And right now there is an advisory warning against people even eating the fish that do survive like Yellow Perch because of the high levels of mercury.

Now, statistics and stories like this must be very hard for those of you who have been champions of the Adirondacks to hear time and time again because one would have thought when it first became scientifically provable that people would have rallied around to act. And we have seen, as I say, some progress over the past 25 years. Landmark Federal laws, such as the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, have cleared up our skies and waterways. But we know we have to do even more at the Federal level. This is not a problem that can or should be solved at the state or local level. It is one of the reasons we must have national action.

First and foremost, we must do more to clear our skies of ozone smog and reduce acid rain. My top environmental legislative priority would be to pass Senator Moynihan's legislation although I would hope that the Congress would give that to him as a going-away present for all of us. (Applause.) But in the event that that does not happen I would become a strong advocate and champion for the Acid Deposition and Ozone Control Act that he introduced in 1998. New York's environment has for too long been degraded by the emissions of power plants in states that are not even all just on our borders.

This bill would force those plants into line by placing a cap on nationwide emissions that would dramatically reduce nitrogen oxide and cut sulphur dioxide again in half. And that would continue what has been a successful program of allowing plants to trade pollution rights with each other but at a much lower capped amount. The 1990 Clear Air Act Amendment showed us that this method of matching market principles to environmental protection can be very successful. And because of the policy, sulphur dioxide emissions have already fallen 25% in parts of the eastern United States. But Senator Moynihan's bill would take us many more steps forward in providing cleaner air for our children and purer rain for our trees, lakes and rivers. This is something that can only come about by working with senators from all over the country on both sides of the aisle and I think that we have an opportunity now that we couldn't have even counted on a few years ago

because of the latest scientific research.

So, I pledge that every time I possibly can I will try to persuade my colleagues from all the states that are now being affected to join us in this new legislation to avoid what has happened here and to try to reverse what has happened here. I will always remember what is at stake because of my visit here to Big Moose Lake. And I will also think always about our children. No child in New York anywhere should have to worry about the water that child drinks. That was something that we all took for granted when I was growing up in the 1950's and most of us who are about my vintage or older didn't think we had to worry very much about that.

And it would be so much cheaper, as well as the right thing to do, if we really took on this problem because as both Major and Bernard pointed out, we are destroying a lot of the piping that exists. It's going to be immensely expensive to relay pipe to carry water, particularly into a city like New York, if we continue to allow this problem to get worse. So, there are many common sense practical reasons to take this action. I am hopeful that I will be able to persuade my fellow senators to do that and certainly as we approach the thirtieth anniversary of Earth Day I can think of no better way to celebrate that celebration of our common heritage and responsibility than recommitting ourselves to do everything we can to make our air and water as clean as they should be.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)