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Reserving Long Island

Preserving Long Island Sound

Huntington, New York

April 19, 2000

I am delighted to be here with all of you. I am very pleased always to be here.

I want to thank all of you for coming. It is an honor and a privilege for me to be in this beautifully restored building. I am to be with so many people dedicated to promoting conservation and the preservation of our environment across Long Island and across the state and indeed across the nation. I think you for the vision and vigilance that you bring to this task and I am looking forward to be a partner with you.

I want to thank Don Cooper for all of John's work in so many ways, and particularly for today John for bringing us together for always being a voice for the environment at the local level. I want to thank you Frank for being with us and letting us know in black and white what is at stake. The environment should not be a partisan issue. It should be an issue where people of good faith, who are concerned about the environment about our health, our children's health to come together and make common ground to do something about it.

I also want to thank Michael White who has been and continues to be and I know will be into the future such an important leader on all these issues. You are a voice of authority and reason.

I also am grateful that there are so many elected officials here. John introduced them all. I am so pleased that we could have such a good turn out. You know (inaudible) you may have read or heard traveling extensively throughout New York State. It is fair to say that we are blessed with one of the most beautiful landscapes and certainly one of the most beautiful states in the country and I have been to a lot of them.

What I have seen on my travels is the varying landscapes that goes from the Great Lakes to the Sound, from the mountains down to the meadows, the incredible variety that we have in this one state. I have been heartened by the extraordinary love for what they live in and the joy it brings, and the

aesthetic pleasures, recreation and the economic opportunities that are there.

But I have also seen more than I wish I have the results of degradation and damage of neglect and abuse. I was in the Adirondacks yesterday. I went to Big Moose Lake, which is one of the larger lakes in the Adirondacks. It was great being there. There is still ice on the lake I will report to you. I was visiting with some of the environmentalists in the Adirondacks. We were talking about the continuing struggle against acid rain, which has been such a curse for the Adirondacks and which has been the subject of national attention for a couple of decades. But which is still getting worse.

The lakes are dying, the forests are dying. The fish that used to bring so many to the lodge there on Big Moose Lake - they are no longer there. You are told that you should not eat the fish, but if you do keep it to one a month, because the levels of Mercury are so high. We know what is causing acid rain. We have known ever since the 1970's. We have known that we have had to take action.

In fact, with the Clean Air amendments, we did take action. But we haven't kept up with the scientific research, so we took action against sulfur dioxide, but we did not know the full impact of the nitrogen oxide. Now we are awaiting a struggle and I pledge to continue Senator Moynihan's advocacy. Legislation that would lower the limits of acceptable emissions of both sulfur and nitrogen oxide and really begin to put caps on our cap and trade system.

It is imperative that we do it. It is also inexcusable that now that we know what we need to do that we are not taking action. This state has had a long bipartisan, nonpartisan tradition of leadership on behalf of the environment. It is a tradition that I am committed to continuing and leading in the United States Senate.

As we are about to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of Earth Day, it is only fitting that we take stock of where we are environmentally in New York and certainly throughout the state from one end to the next, throughout our country and throughout our world.

I want to talk to today about a particular challenge that we

face. That is restoring the Long Island to health and insuring the precious body of water represented by Long Island Sound is there for generations to come. The sound is truly one of New York's and America's national treasures. It played a vital role in both the environmental and economic health of our region.

As Gary memorably told us, one in ten Americans live within 50 miles, well more than 8 million live within the watershed itself. For generations, fishermen and lobstermen have supported families from those waters. It is home to thousands of species of marine life. It is an oasis for people from all walks of life who have come to swim and boat and fish and contribute by doing that billions to the local economy. It is no surprise to everyone in this room that Long Island Sound has come into increasing environmental strain in recent years. Everyday the Sound must absorb run-off from 44 municipal sewage treatment plants, including that of New York City.

We know that the degree and host of pollutants are threatening the marine life of the Sound and we know that the lobster industry is in a crisis. Gary was ahead of the curve in 1993 when he authored legislation for the restoration of Long Island Sound. Many people have joined on to that piece of legislation. It is an important step that we should taking together.

I don't think that it is just a New York issue. In recent years, the Federal government has helped states clean up and protect natural treasures such as Boston harbor and the Everglades. I believe that it is time for Washington to play similar roles with Long Island Sound. If you send me to the United States Senate, I will get to work with Gary and others to fight and increase Federal spending to support the clean up of the Sound. I would like to see it go from 3 million to 80 million dollars a year. With Gary, I will fight also to create a nitrogen credit for trading program to reduce nitrogen discharge by over 60 percent in the next ten years.

Those are steps that we know must be taken. Yet we have summon the political will, work across party lines, get people from other parts of the country to support us. That is why it is important that we put what is happening in the Sound in a larger national context.

Boston Harbor was an important part of our history, well so is

this sound. Think of all the history that happened right here along its shores. Where would the American Revolution have been? Where would so much of what we have seen happen since the beginning of our country have occurred except right here along the waters of our sound.

Through this legislation we can offer Long Island towns greater flexibility in meeting clean up standards. We can provide financial assistance to those who do need it. We can encourage those towns who are most able to do so to limit their own emissions. Since the 1990 Clean Act amendments, we have seen how matching market principles to environmental protection can work. It has helped reduce sulfur dioxide emission by a quarter in parts of the United States. We can bring those same principles here to cleaning up Long Island Sound and by adding nitrogen, which I would like to see added in general, or the acid rain that affects the Adirondacks and for what is polluting the Sound.

I was told yesterday in the Adirondacks by some of the Adirondacks council people that the second biggest source of nitrogen in the Long Island Sound is acid rain for the same sources that pollute the Adirondacks. So all of this ecosystem, which we are trying to demonstrate to people is interconnected, it truly is and we are finding more about that every single year.

Now while this legislation will help to reduce pollution and may therefore help address the lobster crisis, I think we have to get to the bottom of what is happening to the lobsters. That is why I am very pleased that we are taking steps on the Marine Pathology lab. We need to get up and going so that we can respond quickly to environmental attacks, before they become disasters. If there is one lesson that we learned over the past years is that environmental protection and economic development are not mutually exclusive.

Too many years people tried to pit the environment against the economy. That is another one of those false choices that people tried to present to us. We need to reject that false choice. Think of what would happen to the economy of the North Shore if the Sound were dead, if it was brown algae from one end to the next, if you could not in good conscious not enjoy the Sound as the people have for so many generations. That would not be an environmental disaster, that would breed an economic disaster as well.

I would like to be a very forceful advocate in the Senate in efforts to revitalize waterfronts in Long Island, in New York, across America. I know that already community leaders, nonprofits and environmental activists right here are really finding ways to work together to revive blighted waterfronts with new parks and businesses and tourist attractions. We should not be working against that effort by not doing everything we can to get to the bottom of what is happening in the Sound.

I will push for new laws to promote these partnerships and invest in these initiatives to help them transform our waterfronts into hubs and natural beauty and commercial activity.

I am also very concerned about health and particularly about our children's health. I was struck yesterday that the owner of the lodge where we held our meeting said that he first became aware of the problem, when one of his daughters years ago got sick. Nobody could figure out what was wrong with her.

They did test after test. Finally a friend suggested, "well maybe it is in the water." And he tested his water. He found that because of the acidity, the water was leaking through the pipes and mercury and lead was in the water and was making his children sick. We know for a fact that this kind of environmental degradation makes people sick. Children are more vulnerable than adults, because children are not miniature adults. Their little lungs pump more, they roll around in the dirt, they drink things they should not drink. Anyway we know that they are more at risk. So we have to pledge ourselves to this restoration effort, not only for environmental reasons, economic reasons but for health reasons as well.

I am also concerned about the work that we need to be doing to get to the bottom of what is causing the higher than national rate of cancer here on Long Island and other places in New York. If you look at those maps, it is not just here, although this county has the highest rate of breast cancer, prostate cancer, other cancers. So we have to take this very seriously, because I do believe that we will find environmentalist connections and causes.

Whether we live on Long Island or not, the health of the Sound is important to all of us. Every citizen and municipality in the region large and small must take responsibility for that challenge. Now last summer as already as has been mentioned the State court found New York City guilty of 205 counts of dumping illegal amounts of nitrogen and other pollutants from eight sewage treatment plants from the East River and Jamaica Bay into the Long Island Sound. That is simply unacceptable. New York needs leaders, who will work to protect Long Island Sound, not permit illegal dumping, who will respect our waterways and not pollute them.

I will fight everyday for the environment in the Senate. I will fight for the funds that we need to clean up our waterways, I will fight for the restoration of the Sound, I will fight to support research into health care issues and fuel cells and cleaner technologies, to promote public transportation and to ensure that our state get its transportation dollars. All of these things are important to the well being of the environment.

There are many reasons why many of us are in this room. Why we care about the environment, why we have made it an issue, why we in Frank's or Mike's case, we have made it a calling or in Gary's case, part of his public service, or in our county legislators' case, why they are so vigilant. There are many reasons why all of us are here. I think often about all the joy that I have had in my life visiting parks, beaches. And think about the joy any of us have seeing a child discover the beauty of the environment. You just feel that you are connected going back millennia and going forward from that point the first time that a child wades into the Sound or the ocean and is overwhelmed by the beauty and the experience.

To be a strong advocate for children for me is to be a strong advocate for their environment and ours. These two causes children and the environment are inextricably linked. It is very simple to me. Children cannot live to their greatest God-given potential if the air that they breathe leaves them short of breath, if the water they drink makes them sick, if the parks and beaches and forests that they cherish are eroded by smog, acid rain, by dumping of sewage.

That is why fighting for cleaner air, and cleaner water, and healthier forests and healthier lakes for our general well-being is vitally important to the future of our children. So thank you for being committed to that future and understanding how it is

all interconnected.

As we do approach this Earth Day, where the slogan think globally, act locally was first heard, we have a lot to be grateful here both locally and globally, but we have a lot of work to do.

I look forward to doing that work with you. Thank you very much. (applause)