

Remarks of Senator Charles E. Schumer

I would like to begin by thanking the Center for Environmental Information, The Adirondack Council, and the many other event sponsors who have made this day possible. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Thorndike for that very kind introduction. It is a great honor for me to speak to you here in our nation's capital, to discuss this NATIONAL problem.

Perhaps it is no surprise that as a U.S. Senator representing New York State, I am interested in halting the destructive effects of acid rain. After all, my own state is "ground zero" in the fight against it. From Long Island Sound to the lakes and streams of the incomparable Adirondack Mountains, the damage that acid rain has caused is only too apparent.

Today is a hopeful day, because I feel that we are – at long last – coming to view this problem not in regional terms, but as a national challenge that requires a coordinated and cooperative response. In order to solve the acid rain problem, we will have to push past the tired regional antagonisms.

Part of my enthusiasm for this conference today stems from a meeting that I held with Bernard Melewski of the Adirondack Council almost one year ago. The subject then was how we could go about passing legislation to reduce sulfur and nitrogen oxide emissions. He asked me what I needed. I told him simply that we would need a national support network. We would need people across the country first to recognize the extent to which their own communities were being affected by this pollution. Then we would need to get them committed to helping us pass acid rain legislation, which is of such urgency.

Well, I understand that nearly 80 percent of our audience here today resides OUTSIDE the Empire State. That sounds like the beginning of a national support network! Thank you, Bernard.

There is no longer any credible doubt that acid rain has long-term deleterious effects upon our natural environment. Study after study has confirmed this fact. Two reports mandated by Congress in 1990 – the EPA's 1995 report and that of the National Acid Precipitation Assessment

Program – clearly demonstrate that deeper cuts in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide levels are absolutely necessary.

Work by groups as dissimilar as the Ecological Society of America and the General Accounting Office here in Washington have reaffirmed these conclusions.

Just recently, the Hubbard Research Foundation reported that the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 have accomplished little in the way of tackling the acid rain problem, and that the problem is indeed more severe than many had previously suspected.

While this is a well-researched and analyzed subject, it is by no means an academic one. It is a personal one, for whoever has been lucky enough to visit and enjoy our national and state forests.

Not too long ago, I visited New York's Adirondack Park. As a lifelong Brooklyn resident, I am continually amazed at the scope and size of this wonder. We New Yorkers are very fortunate to live in a state where over 100 years ago our elected officials had the foresight to amend the state's constitution to set this land aside for future generations to enjoy.

The Adirondack Park is the largest park in the lower 48 states, and it is the greatest assemblage of wilderness east of the Mississippi River. But the more recent history of the Adirondacks is not nearly as positive.

Acid rain has destroyed nearly 80 percent of the high-elevation red spruce forests there. Over 20 percent of the lakes have been deemed "dead," and close to 55 percent are considered highly acidic. It is estimated the number of "dead lakes" there will double over the next 40 years.

For me, the destruction of this national treasure alone is significant enough to pass federal legislation. As I said earlier, however, we need to educate all Americans about the effects of acid rain in their own communities, if we are going to be successful. In our efforts, the Adirondacks should not be thought of as just New York State's tragedy, but as a cautionary tale to those who would do nothing about acid rain.

In the Southern Appalachians, for instance,

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scientists believe that thousands of miles of streams may soon be void of trout. Currently, 59 percent of the trout streams throughout the Southern Appalachians are considered highly vulnerable to acidification.

Studies have indicated that Maryland receives some of the highest concentrations of sulfate and nitrate deposition in the United States. Acidification is having a detrimental effect on fish populations throughout the state, such as striped bass, white perch, yellow perch and American shad. Research indicates that the sources of the acid rain reach as far away as Indiana and even Canada.

Even Western states are now feeling its effects. The National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) found that episodic acidification may be occurring to a significant degree in many high-elevation western lakes and streams in the Sierra Nevada, Cascade and Rocky mountains which are highly sensitive to acid rain.

As I mentioned earlier, we can no longer resort to the traditional regional antagonisms with regard to acid rain. While New York's position is precarious, it is no longer unique.

Upwind Midwestern States and downwind Northeastern ones must recognize the national significance of this problem. And we must exercise care and caution in our approaches to enlist the President's support, because this issue is too important to wait.

In this Congress, Senator Clinton and I have sponsored two bills that would combat acid rain throughout the nation by reducing power-plant emissions, as power plants are the primary source of acid rain causing pollutants. The first bill, the Acid Rain Control Act, would lower the current caps on sulfur dioxide and create a cap and trade program for nitrogen oxide emissions. It would also authorize the EPA to regulate mercury emissions from utilities. This bill was originally authored by former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, whose leadership on these issues requires no elaboration.

Our second bill, the Clean Power Act, would similarly cut power plant emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and mercury, while also reducing carbon dioxide emissions. This bipartisan bill also has the support of Senators from several different states like Jim Jeffords of Vermont, Susan

Collins of Maine, and Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

I don't need to tell you the extent to which these smokestack pollutants are killing our forests and lakes. But I would like to underscore the fact that they are causing asthma in our children, emphysema and other lung ailments among Americans of all ages, and destroying the facades of some of our great civic buildings. If you require any proof of this, please make the journey over to the U.S. Capitol at the conclusion of today's program.

We have the bills to address these problems, the next question is where we go from here.

Let us resolve to use this great occasion – this milestone conference – to redouble our efforts to broaden support for these measures. We need to reach out to the Administration. While the President has wavered on his support for carbon reductions and we need to change his mind on that score, he has, at least, recognized the importance of reducing sulfur and nitrogen levels.

It may not be as big an opening as we might have hoped, but the door is open and we cannot let this opportunity pass.

We also need to enlist the support of Members of Congress who don't yet understand that acid rain has serious implications for their own constituents.

We need to make it clear that the Virginia trout are worth protecting. That the front range of the Rockies may be in danger. That the futures of Chesapeake Bay and New England Maples are not certain. Finally, we need to convince legislators that the historical monuments in Washington, DC, are under fire.

I promise to work with Senator Clinton, Congressmen Boehlert, Quinn, McNulty, McHugh, and Sweeney to build support on Capitol Hill for these sensible and long overdue measures. I am hopeful about our Senate prospects.

In previous years, I would have thought that the best bet would be jamming these bills into a larger measure by exercising a senator's prerogative to filibuster – a sort of scorched earth approach. Now I am optimistic that we can do this through more normal channels.

Environment & Public Works Committee

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Chairman Bob Smith and Ranking Member Harry Reid have pledged their support to moving these bills through the committee, and I believe they will help. Then we will begin the systematic lobbying of each and every of the U.S. Senate's 100 members.

New York's Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, who introduced landmark litigation to force

polluting utility companies to comply with existing law, will surely continue to do his part.

We have a good chance, but we will need your continued help, and need a great deal of it.

I thank you for your generous welcome. I am inspired by your commitment, and I look forward to working with your organizations to get these bills passed in the 107th Congress. Thank you.

Luncheon Speaker