

Remarks of Congressman John E. Sweeney

Thank you for the invitation to participate in the Center for Environmental Information's conference on one of the most urgent environmental problems facing my state of New York and the nation – the issue of acid rain.

I am pleased you are all here to combine your experiences and expertise in an effort to highlight the scope of the acid rain problem facing our nation.

Acid rain is truly a national problem, and the participation of all of you concerned citizens hailing from dozens of states not only proves this point, but will help make the case throughout our country. Thank you all for your contributions.

As a New Yorker, it is good to see Adirondack Park Agency Chairman Richard Lefebvre, representatives of New York State DEC, and my good friends at the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Nature Conservancy, and Adirondack Mountain Club.

I have seen firsthand the devastation that has slowly and steadily eroded the ecological health of the region.

Since coming to Congress, I have been working to stop acid rain damage to the Adirondacks on two fronts: emissions legislation and funding for acid rain research. As the lead sponsor of H.R. 25, the Acid Rain Control Act in House of Representatives, I am working hard to advocate for further emissions reductions using the framework of the current acid rain program.

The bill would provide cuts to sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides to stop the damage of acid rain to our precious Adirondack Park; would require that the EPA keep its commitment to regulate mercury from power plants in a timely manner.

Introduced the first day of the new Congressional Session, H.R. 25 – so designated as a sign of its importance – currently has 26 cosponsors. We now have the opportunity to reach out to more members from many more states and seek their support for this legislation – and I ask for your help in doing just that.

We also have a unique opportunity to work with President Bush and EPA Administrator Whitman. Both have made strong public commit-

ments to further reductions in Sulfur, Nitrogen and Mercury, and I am working hard to transform those commitments into legislative action.

Five years ago, H.R. 25 was a radical concept. I am confident that we have a real opportunity to make our vision a reality.

I am also pleased, as a member of Appropriations Committee, to be working on an equally important front – to ensure adequate funding for acid rain monitoring and other basic research.

Information derived from acid rain research lays the groundwork for the evaluation of our current programs and for the advancement of acid rain policy initiatives. I am a firm believer in the idea that sound science drives good policy.

I would like to specifically commend New York State scientists present at this conference: Charlie Driscoll of Syracuse University and Greg Lawrence of RPI and US Geological Survey. Your work in New York has been crucial.

Although I won't go into too much detail, it is imperative that we continue the highly successful acid rain monitoring programs – such as the Adirondack Lake Survey Corporation, which does water quality sampling of 52 lakes in the Adirondack Park, and the cloud water monitoring program at Whiteface Mountain. I will continue to work to ensure that these programs receive full funding.

Again, these research efforts – which you are highlighting here this week – pay dividends by providing a greater understanding of the impacts of acid rain. Let me give some examples.

Another Adirondack scourge, black flies, is being compounded by acid rain. Because black flies thrive in acidic waters the acid rain problem has exacerbated the black fly problem in the Adirondacks.

Loons, which are the symbol of a healthy Adirondack wilderness, are adversely affected by higher levels of mercury, one of the deadliest toxic metals associated with acid rain; Cranberry Lake and Stillwater Reservoir, located in the Adirondack Five Pond Wilderness Area, have substantial mercury contamination.

Research has shown that our spruce forests are

Luncheon Speaker

dying because the trees, made weak by acid rain, are threatened by insect infestation and are susceptible to winter injury.

Adirondack lakes, such as Honnendaga Lake, that are dead appear to be clear and beautiful. It is ironic that these lakes, which are so aesthetically pleasing, are devoid of life.

Lakes are an eerie shade of blue because acid rain has killed off plankton and other microscopic life that gives a healthy lake its aqua-marine color.

Amid all of this bad news does come a bit of good. Data now shows that while acid deposition continues to do damage as evidenced above, the current acid rain program, based on the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, has shown measurable success and is putting us within reach of a recovery.

This data confirms that the current acid rain program can be an effective model for instituting greater emissions controls.

Without good science, we could not make such a determination, nor could we understand the full extent of the acid rain problem.

Your work and commitment to this issue are therefore crucial to our efforts to form good public policy. I would like to closely identify with your work and again thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Again, we have a legitimate opportunity for progress in this Congress. This is a fight we can't afford to lose.