

House of Representatives Science Committee: Hearing on Acid Rain - The State of the Science and Research Needs for the Future

Opening Statement for Acid Rain Hearing May 3, 2001

Congressman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) - Chair of the House Science Committee

[Editor Note: The hearing of the House Science Committee on Acid Rain: The State of the Science and Research Needs for the Future was held at the end of the conference and was transferred to the Rayburn Building to enable Committee members to participate in key votes in the House of Representatives that afternoon.]

It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon at this important conference. We're holding this hearing because we want to be sure that Congress takes note of the important research findings that have been aired over the past two days. We will take pains to ensure that the information in today's hearing record is widely circulated and known.

That will be an especially pleasurable task for me because acid rain is one of the first issues I focused on when I first came to Congress back in 1983. To many back then, acid rain was just a theory – and not a very credible one at that. But up in the Adirondacks, in the northern part of my District and beyond, the evidence was accumulating that acid rain was all too real. The dead lakes and thinning trees told an alarming story that many people were not interested in hearing.

Back then, I used to frequently quote from a speech by Tom Kean, who was at that time the governor of New Jersey. Kean said that if all we did was study acid rain, “we'd end up with the best documented environmental disaster in history.” It was a good line, and it sounds even more prescient now because of the way things have turned out. First, we heeded the warning, we overcame the naysayers, and we did indeed take action. We passed the Title IV of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, and we launched the war on acid rain, and I'm quite proud of my role in helping to draft that legislation. And, even more encourag-

ingly, as the latest research shows, that legislation has made a real – if insufficient – difference.

Second, the continuing research has, as we had expected, demonstrated that the problems caused by acid rain are truly severe, varied and widespread. We can now document the impacts of acid rain on lakes, aquatic species, trees and soil in ways that we could only guess at in the early '80s.

So what we've ended up with is genuine action, real improvement, and growing documentation that we need to do still more. And I'm trying to get the Congress to do more as an author of both H.R. 25, the Acid Rain Control Act, and H.R. 1256, the Clean Smokestacks Act. Those bills would require significant additional cuts in sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and new cuts in mercury.

But to make the case for those additional cuts we need to rely on the best, most recent, credible science. And that's why today's hearing is so important.

We'll hear this afternoon from the top scientists in the country studying acid deposition and related problems to get a clearer sense of what steps we need to take. And – and this is especially important from a Science Committee perspective – we'll hear what kind of research and what kind of monitoring networks the federal government needs to support to ensure that we continue to get the science we need to avert disaster.

The response to acid rain has thus far been a story of the system succeeding – a story of Congress acting on the basis of the best research, even in the face of uncertainty, and then trying to update policy on the basis of continuing research. That's a pattern we need to perpetuate. We need to keep funding the research and heeding its results. Today's hearing should further those goals.

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