

Testimony of

George Heartwell

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UNITED STATES SENATE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Testimony of:

The Honorable George Heartwell

Mayor of Grand Rapids, Michigan

Vice Chair, Great Lakes and

St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

Good afternoon Chairman Feingold and Ranking Member Specter. Thank you for providing me this opportunity to testify on a matter of utmost importance to all the people of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence community. My name is George Heartwell, and I am the mayor of Grand Rapids, Michigan, a city of almost 200,000 and part of a metropolitan area with almost 900,000 people. I also serve as Vice Chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, a coalition of 56 United States and Canadian cities with a combined population of over 12 million people who are working together to protect and restore this resource.

Water is the lifeblood of our cities. We have the good fortune of living in the basin of a true, global freshwater treasure. The waters of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence nourish over 40 million people, provide a place for recreation to millions of residents and visitors, are the highways for commercial shipping, irrigate the crops for agriculture, feed the industries that employ our residents, warm and cool our air and influence our weather, and serve us in many other ways. There are good reasons why the original Native American tribes settled in the area, why the explorers came, why people settled here and built their cities, and why the area continues to provide a very high quality of life and economic well being to millions of people. It's all about the water.

Over the past century, our industrial, agricultural, and residential activities have placed significant stress on the water resource of the Great Lakes. Invasive species, industrial discharges, runoff, toxic contamination, combined sewer overflows, wetland destruction, and many other threats have degraded

the quality of the resource. The problems became so serious that one of the Great Lakes - Erie - was declared dead and a major river - the Cuyahoga - caught on fire. Fortunately, major efforts over the past 30 years have resulted in some significant improvements, but major threats remain.

More recently, concerns over the quantity of water have grown in the area. Significant reductions in lake levels across the basin are creating problems for recreational boating, commercial shipping, municipal water intakes, coastal wetland viability, and many other uses. Although heavy rains this summer have brought levels up in several of the lakes, recent experience has demonstrated how significantly changes in lake levels can affect our economy and environment. And, the effects of climate change and many other factors pose long-term challenges.

We in the cities are doing our part to deal with these water quality and quantity problems. A study we completed earlier this year with the Great Lakes Commission documented over \$15 billion in investments annually by local governments in the United States and Canada to protect and restore the resource. In addition, the cities of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative have launched a water conservation framework which 33 cities have joined to work toward a goal of a 15% reduction in water consumption between 2000 and 2015.

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact (the Compact) is essential for protecting the long term integrity of the resource. The leadership of the Great Lakes Governors, working with the Canadian Premiers on the parallel Agreement with our neighbors to the North, has been exemplary in bringing us to this point. The Governors ensured that local government had a voice in the development of the Compact, and also included a broad range of stakeholders in the deliberations. The result is a document that has received broad support as it worked its way through the state legislatures and received the signatures of the eight governors. Many of our member cities of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative provided support to the Compact as it was considered in the state legislatures, and I was honored to have the opportunity to testify for it in the Michigan legislature. Our organization has supported the Compact and Agreement with resolutions at several of our annual meetings, and has distributed them widely. Those resolutions are attached to my testimony for your information.

Most importantly, the Compact represents a commitment to stewardship by eight states, based on extensive input from cities, Native American tribes, as well as many stakeholders, of the fresh water of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. As a resource management tool, it calls for the states to establish water conservation and efficiency programs to ensure the best use of this precious resource. There will also be new measures in place to track and account for water use much more effectively than ever before. Establishing and managing the administration of these programs will place added financial burdens on the states, but we are confident that the high priority nature of this effort will lead to the commitment of the necessary resources to make it a success. Cities stand ready to provide support to the states in whatever way we can.

The fundamental principle underlying the Compact is that regions of the country should have the right and the responsibility to manage the resources in the area. There is no resource more fundamental to the quality of life and well being of people than water. The United States Constitution explicitly contemplates compacts of this nature, and Congress has provided its consent to 41 interstate compacts over the years that involve 45 states and the District of Columbia. Much like the states surrounding the Chesapeake Bay, those on the Colorado River, and Florida with the Everglades, the Great Lakes States, working with their cities and other partners, are in the best position to ensure the long term integrity of the resource. Working with our Canadian neighbors, we are confident that the leadership of the states and provinces, with strong support from the cities, will manage this resource wisely long into the future so that succeeding generations will have the full benefit of this global freshwater treasure.

On behalf of the people of Grand Rapids, the people of the cities of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Basin, and all the people in the region, I strongly urge you to pass Senate Joint Resolution 45 for the good of the region and of the country.

Thank you very much, and I will be happy to answer any questions.