

**Statement of  
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment  
Hearing On  
“Reauthorization of the Great Lakes Legacy Act”  
May 21, 2008**

Today, the Subcommittee will hear testimony on the reauthorization of the Great Lakes Legacy Act. This program aims to address the legacy of contaminated sediment that degrades water quality throughout the Great Lakes, and threatens the health of populations who live in the region.

The Great Lakes Legacy Act of 2002 was a good first step in addressing the contaminated sediment that despoils the water resources upon which a successful transformation of the region will depend. Introduced by Congressmen Ehlers and Oberstar, it aimed to clean those many contaminated sites that had been largely overlooked by ongoing federal toxic waste site clean-up efforts. Not only was the Superfund process perceived as slow, litigious and unwieldy, many contaminated sites in the Great Lakes region were not included on the list of sites that would ultimately be addressed by the Superfund. Yet, many of these sites were too large and too toxic for states and localities to deal with on their own.

In addition, many, many communities throughout the Great Lakes region were left with the chronically toxic effects of contaminated sediment that relegated their towns and peoples to health risks and economic underachievement. The Great Lakes Legacy Act of 2002 sought to address these largely abandoned sites and Areas of Concern by providing a dedicated source of federal funding for clean-up and remediation.

This morning, we look to what has worked over the past five years with the Legacy Act, what challenges remain, and how these can be addressed. The Legacy Act of 2002 authorized \$50 million a year for five years to clean up contaminated sediment at hazardous waste sites in 31 Areas of Concern. To this end, the program has been successful, but only to a degree. Of the 31 Areas of Concern, one – Oswego River in New York – has been delisted. Cleanup has been completed at four sites.

I want to highlight, however, that this is cleanup of only four sites – not four Areas of Concern. Many of the sites targeted by the original Legacy Act remain as they were in 2002 – untouched and continuing to leach their toxic legacy into the Lakes. Perhaps this is because the program has been consistently underfunded by the Administration over the past five years. Perhaps there are structural issues within the Legacy Act itself that need to be addressed. Nevertheless, the fact remains that 10 Areas of Concern in Michigan, four in New York, one in Pennsylvania, three in Ohio, and three in Wisconsin remain wholly unaddressed.

Let me be clear to my colleagues on this Subcommittee. The scientific record is very well established on the health impacts of these toxics on human populations. To be blunt, that so many hazardous waste sites remain unaddressed is a public health risk of the first order. As a former nurse, I can say with clear conviction that as a body we would be remiss if we did

not find a way to clean these toxic hotspots at a far faster pace than we have over the past five years. We cannot shirk from our responsibility on that front.

I look forward to hearing testimony from our witnesses today on how we can improve on the Legacy Act program.