CONGRESS AND CLEAN WATER

By

Hon. John E. Fogarty of Rhode Island
House of Representatives, U. S. Congress

This is the third time since mid-August that I have come to New England to talk on the general subject of environmental protections and environmental health. In August I had the honor of taking part in ground-breaking exercises for the new Northeast Shellfish Sanitation Research Center at Kingston, Rhode Island, and last month I had the additional honor of speaking at the dedication of the new nutrition and environmental health buildings at Harvard University.

During the past several years I have welcomed every opportunity to speak on the importance of protecting our environment from pollution and contamination. I am convinced that we must work much harder to protect the surroundings in which we work, live, and play. Our population, our industrialization and our technical sophistication are growing so rapidly that they are

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threatening to overwhelm us. If we do not take adequate steps now our world will become an ugly place to live in and one dangerous to health and even to life itself. I for one do not intend this shall happen.

I do not mean that we must stop the clock on growth and progress. Our economy must grow and we must encourage it to do so. But I am one to demand that our advances take place in such a way that our health and well-being are not threatened. I do not intend that our people or our people's children shall live in a wasteland which has come about through pollution and poor planning.

Your interest in this organization is primarily an interest in water and you have asked me this noon to speak to you on the role of the Federal Government in water pollution control. I am sure that all of us realize, however, that it is no longer possible to separate out one part of our environment and talk about it very meaningfully. Our world is changing very rapidly -- particularly our world here in New England -- and water is only one of the elements of our environment which we must learn to manage and control more effectively than we now do.

If water pollution is only one of many environmental hazards, however, it is a very important one. It is also one which has commanded public attention for the longest period of time. Water pollution was recognized as a danger to health centuries ago, long before the mechanisms of disease and disease transmission were known. Here in this country, the protection of our water supplies was one of the first concerns of our first health department, which Massachusetts set up in 1869. Later came the historic establishment of the Lawrence Experiment Station in 1887, the development of research and training programs in our New England universities, and the creation of our State and interstate water pollution control programs. I should also list in this brief significant New England history the formation of this federation, which is one of the oldest professional groups in the United States in this field.

Up until very recently, the Federal Government stood on the sidelines in water pollution abatement. The Public Health Service Act of 1912 authorized surveys and studies of water pollution and important research work and field survey was done but it was not until 1948 that Congress enacted a bill specifically

directed to water pollution itself. Even this was temporary legislation, so that 1956 becomes the actual birthday of a permanent Federal program.

I suspect I see eye to eye with you on what the attitude of Congress should be towards the role of the Federal Government in this or in any other phase of environmental health. This role should continue to be a limited one. States and communities have the primary responsibility for keeping their environs healthful. The Federal Government should do only those things which cannot be done or cannot be done adequately without Federal support. Research -- on the scale required -- must be Federally supported. Enforcement action to prevent pollution calls for Federal participation when jurisdictions or other situations preclude effective State or local action. Financial aid for developing State and regional plans, for river basin studies and for other programming is also a justifiable field for Federal assistance. So are incentive grants to municipalities for assistance in building needed facilities.

Let me speak to you briefly of a field in which I have a particular interest, that of research. It has been my privilege to be the chairman of the Congressional

appropriations subcommittee that deals with appropriations for the Public Health Service and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. I have been on that committee for a period longer than any other present Member of the Congress. Many of you are familiar with the Federal programs of medical research and the advances which are being made in finding the causes -- and hopefully -- the cures for cancer, heart disease, mental illness, and others.

I am proud of my part in getting the funds which the National Institutes of Health of the Public Health Service have needed. It is money well spent. Many times I have listed to audiences such as this some examples of what this research has accomplished. We used to have about 2,000 babies born prematurely every year, who became totally blind when they were just a few weeks old. That doesn't happen any more. We used to have about 400 babies every year who seemed normal at first but had become idots or morons by the time they were two or three years old. This problem, too, is on the way out. It used to be that if you were told you had cancer, you knew it was the end; not any more. Out of every six people who get cancer now, two are saved;

and half could be saved if full use were made of all the knowledge about cancer produced by research. The marvels of heart and brain surgery; the vaccines that protect against polio and soon will protect against measles -- all these and other advances have come directly or indirectly as a result of the big push on medical research which began about 25 years ago when we set up the National Cancer Institute, first of the seven big National Institutes of Health.

I think that research on a scale similar to this needs to be addressed now to the problems of environmental health -- indeed, I think research at this level is long overdue. How much more do we know either about the prevention of water pollution or the effects of water pollution than we did 10, 20, or more years ago -- yet how much more should we know, in view of today's problems of a growing population and in a growing industry?

A great deal has been said lately of an expanding population. More significant than numbers of people to me is that we are getting to live closer and closer together. When I was young, half the people in the United States lived in cities. Today, two-thirds live in them

and by 1975, 75 percent or three out of every four persons will live in metropolitan centers. Most of these city dwellers, moreover, will live in one or another of four giant super-cities. The first of these will run along the West Coast from San Francisco to San Diego, the second will lie along the southern shores of the Great Lakes, the third will be along the Ohio River and the fourth and largest of them all will begin in Boston and extend all the way to Norfolk. The water demands of this population will be enormous; so will the municipal and industrial wastes which will come from these super cities.

Our changing population and our changing industry have inevitably made water pollution control more difficult; at the same time, they have made the need for water pollution control more pressing. We cannot allow wastes to so poison and contaminate our waters that we endanger our health, or stifle and destroy industry, or kill wildlife, or rob us of recreational opportunities. Somehow we must develop the technologies and build the facilities to keep our waters clean. Perhaps this need has been slow to become apparent to us, but the people of this country now recognize it. They are beginning

to realize that we can not significantly increase our God-given rainfall and water supply -- but we can clean up manmade pollution.

There are many steps in water pollution control we can take today, steps which we are not taking. At the previous session of the Congress this was recognized in a series of amendments to the 1956 Water Pollution Control Act. These amendments among other things called for increased Federal aid to cities and States and widen the enforcement powers of the Federal Government.

I am sure you will agree that both Federal aid and Federal enforcement powers are necessary. Yet the States have the first opportunity and yes, the primary responsibility for pollution control over their waters.

The first step in a Federal enforcement proceeding, as you know, is a formal fact-finding conference. If this fact-finding process is feared, we must ask ourselves why this is so. It is entirely possible for a Federal conference to show that the necessary steps are already being taken to abate pollution, that pollution either no longer exists or is being corrected. I know the time will come when most Federal conferences

will come up with exactly such findings as these. Meanwhile we must face the facts as they exist.

As important as Federal aid or Federal enforcement, is Federal support for research. We do not know how to measure all the pollutants which are going into our waters, or assess the damage they do, or even identify all of them. We need better ways to treat wastes now and we will need immeasurably better ways tomorrow, when our water needs will be so much greater than they are today.

It is my job as chairman of the House appropriations sub-committee to see that Congress appropriates the necessary funds to enable the executive branch to carry out the will of Congress, as expressed in law. During the past session of Congress we appropriated what the executive branch requested for research and we appropriated what it asked in order to build regional laboratories. We went further even than this.

My committee felt that the Federal Government was going too slow on river basin pollution control planning. We added one million dollars to expand this program. We also did something else. Witnesses came before us and pointed out that water pollution control

is being hindered by lack of solid information about what the qualities of water should be. We consequently appropriated funds to build two new laboratories, one for salt water and one for fresh water.

The Public Health Service will use the new laboratories we provided to develop standards of water quality for all potential uses of water, including the protection of wildlife, aquatic life, industry, recreation, and commercial and sport fisheries.

I am sure you will understand me when I say I was most active in calling the attention of the administration to Rhode Island as the best possible site for the salt water laboratory. I am proud that the administration, including the specialists in this field, agreed with me and that this laboratory will be built in Kingston.

This laboratory which is to locate in Kingston will make the Narragansett Bay one of the leading marine research laboratories in the world. The west side of the Bay has close access to unpolluted supplies of fresh water, ocean water, and bay water ranging from low to high salinity. The University of Rhode Island already has an oceanographic laboratory which is

designated by the National Science Foundation as one of the ten university programs in the country to receive oceanographic support. The University serves as the educational center in this field for other States of New England. And nearby are other resources -- the scientific talent of Woods Hole, the university complex in Boston, and the New England station of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

I have been very active, as you know, in developing a Federal research program to protect the quality of our important shellfish resource. One result is a new shellfish laboratory, now being built in Kingston, this also will add greatly to the scientific stature of the Narragansett Bay area.

I personally stand ready to back with appropriate Federal support the efforts of the Narragansett Bay complex or any university or other research institution which is capable of contributing to our knowledge of the water problem. The mechanism of the grants from the Public Health Service is ready for your use and to make the task easier. I have already insisted that the Public Health Service's budget breakdown identify the grant funds for such support.

We need in this country today a scientific break through in environmental health and particularly in the control of water pollution -- the same kind of break through as our scientists have already given us in physics, in space, in some fields of medicine, and in other fields.

I hope as a New Englander that our section can contribute to this break through. I hope your organization and the many groups you represent can help us in this.

We in New England have a higher stake in clean water than most other parts of the country and in my opinion we have the highest concentration of scientific talent anywhere. Let us put need and talent together and move forward. You may depend on my help in the Federal Congress.