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**Transcript of the public meeting held by
the International Joint Commission
on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement Review
at Rochester, New York, on November 10, 2005
(duration: 47 minutes)**

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**Transcription de la réunion publique tenue par
la Commission mixte internationale
sur l'examen de l'Accord relatif à la qualité de
l'eau dans les Grands Lacs
à Rochester (New York) le 10 novembre 2005
(durée : 47 minutes)**

IRENE BROOKS (Commissioner, U.S. Section, International Joint Commission): Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to our public meeting. I think we're ready to begin. I see many faces that I saw this afternoon at RIT, it's good to see you again tonight.

Before we begin, I'd like to introduce Ed Daugherty, who is Department of Environmental Services with Rochester, and he is here to give welcoming remarks on behalf of Mayor Johnson. And we were just chatting a minute ago, so Ed, the microphone is yours.

ED DAUGHERTY (Department of Environmental Services, City of Rochester): Thank you. I will borrow your mic for a moment. I just want to welcome everyone here to City Hall. I would like to welcome Commissioner Robert Gourd – right? Did I get that right? Close?

ROBERT GOURD (Commissioner, Canadian Section, International Joint Commission): Your French is pretty good.

ED DAUGHERTY: My French is quite awful. And Commissioner Irene Brooks, as well as staff members of the International Joint Commission. And certainly, I want to welcome all of you tonight who have come to either listen to tonight's proceedings or to contribute your thoughts, ideas, and so forth.

On behalf of Mayor Bill Johnson, I'd like to salute everybody for their efforts to try and help do what we can to make the Great Lakes as viable and great as we possibly can.

I think all of us in Rochester know how indebted we are to water quality, how our water bodies, the Genesee River and Lake Ontario, were critical to our early growth and critical to our renaissance.

I find it fascinating that we find so much of our effort and energy focused on waterfront revitalization, and nothing is more important to that than making sure that the quality of the water is the best that it possibly can, and so I especially salute you in your efforts to update the water quality plan.

So I'd like to thank you and wish you a good evening and welcome to Rochester. Welcome, commissioners, and welcome, public.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you very much. As Ed said, my name is Irene Brooks, I am a U.S. commissioner. And with me is Robert Gourd, who is a commissioner from the Canadian side. And we welcome you to this meeting tonight on the review or the pre-review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

And we thank the mayor of Rochester for allowing us to use this room. It's enabled us to cut the expenses and have more meetings than originally the two governments intended; they asked for six and we gave them 14.

I'll start with the drill for tonight. There are cards to fill out, and if you wish to speak tonight - they're right here, John is holding them up - and we will take speakers in the order in which they have provided us with the form. And if you hold up your hand, we'll make sure you get a form.

Everything that is said tonight will be recorded, so we ask that you use the mic. Staff will synthesize the reports from all 14 meetings and send a report onto governments, the IJC will send a report of what your views are.

We also have a Web site - I think the information is in front of me, on the screen – a Web site that you can send in your comments. There's also an 800 number that will cost you nothing if you prefer to use the phone. You can use snail mail.

And there's also something new we're trying called the Web dialogue, which begins November 29th through December 2nd, where you can log on and join the conversation that will be ongoing. So we're anxious to see how that works and how many people participate in that.

The comments, I believe, will be accepted to the end of the month, but in reality, if you think of something, we will certainly accept it. Governments will start their review in March of 2006.

And the purpose of our meeting and being here with you tonight is so that we can kick off the Agreement review for governments and provide them with the priorities and comments that the public has presented to us.

And they have been excellent meetings, starting a couple of weeks ago. I believe this is one of the last, so we saved the best for the last, so we're hoping to have many comments from Rochester.

I think most of you are familiar with the Agreement, but just to give you a brief overview, in 1972, when the Great Lakes were suffering from heavy loads

of conventional pollutants, the governments signed a visionary agreement that focused on reducing pollution from municipal and industrial sources, and in particular on controlling the input of phosphorus.

The governments recognized that it would be necessary to adapt to the new challenges, so in 1978, they signed a new Water Quality Agreement, and the 1978 Agreement took an ecosystem approach and focused on persistent toxic substances.

A protocol was added to the Agreement in 1987 to address degraded conditions in Great Lakes Areas of Concern and to reduce critical pollutants on a lake-wide basis.

The Agreement provides a framework for binational goals and cooperative efforts to restore and protect the Great Lakes, but governments have not made many changes since the 1987 Protocol, and that's almost 20 years.

So the two governments are now getting ready to review the Agreement. In preparation for that, they have asked us to hold these meetings to find out your views on how well the Agreement has worked and what, if anything, needs to be changed.

The governments and the IJC believe that it is very important that the Great Lakes community be heard at this stage so that governments get a sense of your priorities.

I think, recognizing many people in the audience being quite expert on Great Lakes issues, I think we'll begin. And we'd rather hear from you, that's the

purpose of the meeting. I have one person that would like to speak at this point; now we have some more. That's great. We appreciate that.

So the first speaker is Charles Naugh. And Charles, we met today, thank you for coming again. If you want to introduce yourself and your affiliation, thank you.

CHARLES NAUGH (Remedial Action Plan Coordinator, Rochester Area of Concern, Health Department, County of Monroe): I'm here as a representative of the County of Monroe. I serve for the Health Department as Remedial Action Plan Coordinator for the Rochester Area of Concern, and I have a letter to the Commission from our County Executive:

Dear commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Lake Ontario, as the northern border of Monroe County, is one of the prime contributors to the quality of life in our area, providing a source of clean, safe drinking water, a world-class sport fishery, a place for recreational boating and swimming, and a scenic beauty that is second to none.

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement has been an important force in moving both Lake Ontario and the Great Lakes that influence this phenomenal resource toward restoration of beneficial uses.

Monroe County has been active in efforts to meet the goals of the Agreement: taking action to upgrade our Frank E. Van Lare Wastewater Treatment Facility to consistently meet or exceed the phosphorus goals of the

Agreement and to reduce use to sludge incineration; continuously improve operations of our state-of-the-art wastewater storage and conveyance tunnel system to substantially reduce combined sewage overflows to the Genesee River and Irondequoit Bay; to eliminate the County's Gates-Chili-Ogden Wastewater Treatment Facility discharge to the Genesee river by routing of that way stream to the Van Lare facility; work with local municipalities to upgrade or eliminate small wastewater treatment systems discharging to local tributaries of the Genesee River and the Rochester embayment and to expand the sanitary sewer network into areas served by aging septic systems; develop and implement, with our partners in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Stage 1 and Stage 1 Remedial Action Plans for the Rochester embayment Area of Concern, documenting beneficial use impairments, and setting criteria for de-listing and objective standards for meeting these criteria; encourage and assist local municipalities in meeting the challenges posed by non-point source pollution from stormwater, streambank erosion, and agricultural inputs through public water education, cross-jurisdictional watershed management planning, and the implementation of best management practices.

While the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and its annexes are noteworthy for their comprehensiveness, Monroe County recommends that any update to the Agreement: recognizes the serious threat from biological pollution by invasive species and takes a much stronger position on control of existing

invasive species and prevention of further introduction; includes a greater focus on processes occurring in the near-to-shore areas of the Lakes that are causing continued problems with eutrication and growth of nuisance algae; develop some method of addressing atmospheric transport from outside the Great Lakes basin as a serious source of contaminants and recognizes the difficulty presented to localities when expectations for remediating these substances are placed at the local level; and continues in its strong support for remedial actions both within the Areas of Concern and within the Lakes proper; and incorporates greater emphasis on the impact of the contributing watersheds of the Lakes into the language of the Agreement.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Sincerely, Maggie Brooks, Monroe County Executive. This is the letter. Thank you.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you very much. Next we have June Summers.

JUNE SUMMERS (Genesee Valley Audubon Society): I'm with Genesee Valley Audubon Society, and my statement isn't nearly as long or quite as well done as Charlie's.

I will say that in 1995, Genesee Valley Audubon Society and a number of other groups, along with the Department of Environmental Conservation, started the New York River Otter Project, which restored 279 river otters in central and western New York.

I was struck at that time, when looking at the proposed released locations, that none were along the shore of Lake Ontario. Ten years later, we have reports that there are river otters here, and we know that the Commission has worked very hard to clean up all of the non-point source polluters and everything that Charlie mentioned.

So far, though, we're not there, and I ask you to use all of your influence as possible to continue your work on these efforts.

And I will say, the first Sunday in October, as I led a hike on Gratticks (?) Bay and I saw two young eagles just above the treetops, I wondered if they could sustain themselves here, on the shore of Lake Ontario, and still be able to reproduce.

The contaminants and the fish are still there. I don't know if we'll ever be able to get them out. But I urge you to continue your work in this area. Thank you.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you very much. Next, Rachel Heckle, correct?

RACHEL HECKLE (Great Lakes United): Thank you very much. I'm here on behalf of Great Lakes United, and we're an international coalition of about 170 member organizations across the Great Lakes in the U.S. and Canada, First Nations and Tribes.

At first, I'd like to thank the commissioners for holding these public consultations across the basin, as these public forums for comment recognize that citizens are equal stakeholders capable of and responsible for effecting decisions

and policies that directly impact the future of their communities, the quality of their health and their children's health.

These forums over the last month exist as a vital component to the Agreement's review, and perhaps most importantly exist as a first step in a renewed vision for the Great Lakes, one where the policies and experience of the Great Lakes and the commitment of the Great Lakes citizens and governments can once again make an unprecedented effort to protect water quality and pollution and compel ecosystem restoration.

I would like to quote a very forthright and important excerpt from the IJC's sixth biennial report, published in 1982: "It can never be said that we can totally halt the input of persistent toxic substances into the system or totally eliminate them, but humans can control what they do. So we say that there should be and shall be zero discharge or zero input of persistent toxic substances as a result of human activities."

Seen in this light, the Commission believes that virtual elimination is a necessary and reasonable goal and that zero discharge or nil human input is the necessary and not unreasonable tactic for achievement of virtual elimination strategy.

Humans and wildlife are threatened by exposure to the continued use, generation, release, and disposal of persistent toxic substances.

Of particular concern still are those substances known as persistent organic pollutants. Our understanding of these substances has greatly increased.

Likewise, our analytical methods have advanced to provide data on additional persistent contaminants for which we have no regulation or comprehensive strategy to address.

At one time, the Great Lakes experience gave momentum to the global effort to eliminate POPs. Once again, Great Lakes policy can set a global precedent for the protection of human health, carried out by the nations of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway region.

So the Water Quality Agreement should be recognized for what it is and what it has accomplished, a fine and eloquent statement of environmental consciousness, a discrete tool and guide for the governments to maintain chemical integrity, and a commitment to cooperation across borders that transcends our national interests and seeks to promote health, vitality, and democracy to all people by protecting a scarce natural resource on which we rely for so much.

The Water Quality Agreement should be revitalized as it can and should reflect how far we have come in understanding the science of water quality issues and how much our new understanding tells us about what we don't know, and lastly what this means in the context of our Great Lakes experience over the last century.

Instead of debating and questioning what level of contamination is acceptable, why not challenge and continue to challenge our sophisticated intellectual, business, government, and grassroots communities to focus on

solutions to avoid harm? The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement can continue to unite us to do so in the face of emerging threats to the Lakes.

Considering the events of Katrina, the unforeseeable tragedy compounded by toxic chemical contamination, there no longer exists two sides to the coin in planning. You cannot plan for just the right amount of human or ecological exposure to hazardous risk.

The Great Lakes are diverse and miraculous, but they also are extremely fragile, and we have control over what we do. The Agreement must address emerging chemical threats to the Great Lakes in a preventative way.

This need is urgent, as certain emerging chemical threats have already shown to adversely affect wildlife, and we still know little about synergistic, additive or interactive effects of legacy and emerging contaminants.

High production volume flame retardants such as decabrominated diphenyl ethers and halogenated flame retardants, perfluorinated compounds, certain pharmaceuticals and personal care products, are some examples of relatively newer and known contaminants and chemical threats to the Great Lakes water quality.

While the history of water issues show us political, moral, economic, social, and other divisions, and on balance, the Water Quality Agreement can clarify our responsibilities and ensure a growing momentum for seeing our Great Lakes as the integrated ecosystem of people, water, resources, and nature.

When we acknowledge the trade-off of positive and adverse impacts of our daily activities, such as production, purchasing, disposal, and recycling, we see that it makes sense to ensure we reduce, avoid, or eliminate the use of toxic substances or generation of hazardous by-products.

One of my best friends was born and raised practically in the waters of Lake Erie. She is still a veritable fish. Her childhood memories, her passion for biology, all tie her to her deep affection for the Lakes.

But we adore the beauty and the Lakes and accept their degradation all in the same moment. I never thought the waves of sick and dead fish and birds should be alarming on the shores of Lake Erie, nor did I know better growing up when my friend would be sick for three days if she happened to swim at the wrong time between rainfalls.

These things cannot be casually accepted, as they can be addressed by our efforts under a strong and dynamic Agreement.

So in conclusion, I would like to acknowledge once again the importance of the International Joint commissioners as civil servants. The IJC has an immense impact on our strong sense of community, shared decision-making, and the equal participation and open-mindedness in achieving the Water Quality Agreement goals.

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement principles and tenants in practice can lead to common multinational solutions that we can trust and invest

in because the IJC can and should provide the critical review of these solutions with clarity and foresight.

We share the Great Lakes, and thus share the responsibility to work together as engaged citizens, accountable governments, and objective overseers.

So a renewed and revitalized Agreement, with innovative principles for water quality and ecosystem protection, the political will of the U.S. and Canada, and a committed IJC, can protect humans and wildlife and ensure safe and clean water for everyone. And I thank you very much.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you, Rachel. Would you like to submit your written remarks?

RACHEL HECKLE: Yes, but probably not this one because it's all marked up...

IRENE BROOKS: Okay. Well, you can send them in if you like.

RACHEL HECKLE: But I will, yes.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you for your comments. Next, Ann Jones.

ANN JONES (League of Women Voters of Rochester Metropolitan Area):
My name is Ann Jones. I represent the League of Women Voters of Rochester Metropolitan Area.

It's our understanding you want to find out how well we think the IJC agreement has worked so far and how we might like to see it changed.

In 1997, the League of Women Voters of New York State came to a position on watershed protection, part of which reads "there is a need for

comprehensive ecosystem management within each watershed”, including “a regional approach to water regulation.”

Also, the League supports strong regulations to reduce non-point source pollution. Therefore, we congratulate the IJC for its emphasis on ecosystem management.

The League of League of Women Voters’ view is that over the next centuries, good stewardship of the land and water in the entire Great Lakes system will protect from devastation which could rival that of the hurricanes of 2005. They took place over a very short time.

We look forward to future management of the entire Great Lakes ecosystem, recognizing that what happens in once region affects the whole region.

We support and admire the IJC’s policy of adaptive management. New knowledge and understanding of how ecosystems work requires constant changing of environmental management techniques.

Without your willingness to change management techniques, there will be no improvement in results. The IJC needs to continue its policy of adaptive management.

Our major concern is that the IJC must rely on the good will of ten – and I guess I should have said 12 – political entities for development, funding, and enforcement of its policies and projects.

The funding necessary to implement the Rochester Area Embayment Remedial Action Plan, for example, has not appeared yet, although I must admit that after several years of waiting, it looks as though funding might begin soon. The New York State Legislature has failed to pass legislation that would protect upstate wetlands.

These are just two of the several possible examples that concern us. We do not know how to make our needs to politically attractive that the fundings and actions we need will occur. If you find a way, will you please let us know?

Thank you for coming to Rochester and for letting us speak directly to you.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you, Ann. Just to be clear, the Agreement belongs really to Canada and the United States. IJC monitors what the governments do and we report on their progress and give them advice, but the Agreement is between the two parties and is not an IJC agreement. So I just wanted to be that clear on that.

ANN JONES: Yes.

IRENE BROOKS: I understand your point. Did you want to submit your remarks to us, written remarks? That would be helpful. Thank you.

For those of you who have come in since we started the meeting – and I think Joel in the back of the room has informed everybody individually – if you wish to speak tonight, if you would fill out the form, we would love to hear your comments. Next is Jennifer Knobaun (?).

ROBERT GOURD: And actually, anybody that wants to submit a text, you are welcome. So if you don't want to speak but you want to submit a text, it's good.

JENNIFER NELLBAUN: Can we just speak and not submit text?

IRENE BROOKS: Oh sure.

JENNIFER NELLBAUN: I think that's what I'm going to do. Good evening. My name is Jennifer Nellbaun (?), I work for Great Lakes United as well. Again, we're a binational coalition of organizations and concerned individuals around the Great Lakes basin and the St. Lawrence River.

Firstly, I don't think the value of the Great Lakes resource can be understated or stated too much. Until...we don't have to use metaphors like the Great Lakes are a gold mine or freshwater is to the Great Lakes like oil is to the Mideast, I don't think we've overstated the value of the Great Lakes.

We just need to be able to say...I live in the Great Lakes region and people understand the incredible responsibility and the incredible value of the region we live in.

I am sure, as you have travelled around the region in this preliminary public consultation, you have also experienced the unique characteristics of each country, each state, each province, each territory, each watershed, each lake, each city, and the unique characteristics that this region contains and the diversity of people and habitats and ecosystems, and yet we're all united, and what happens upstream affects those downstream.

This is a noble challenge, to try to protect this resource and to unite the efforts throughout the region. And I'd like to thank you first of all for that and to commend the progress that has happened under the Water Quality Agreement.

I do have some general recommendations and some guidance to provide as the Water Quality Agreement review moves forward.

Firstly, I'd like to encourage you and to urge you to push forward to continue in advancing zero discharge goals, both by reviewing old strategies to see what has work and will continue to work and to look and see what hasn't worked and what needs to be reinvigorated, or new strategies developed.

The calling for zero discharge cannot be weakened in any way, and I applaud you for that, for the commitment to zero discharge.

We'd like to stress the need to enhance and amplify the need for prevention, both preventing emerging threats such as emerging chemicals of concern, but also the emerging threats of invasive species and things that are coming from outside the basin such as global warming.

As our mothers have told us, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and that is in no place learned more than here in the Great Lakes region.

I'd like to urge you to ensure that the Water Quality Agreement goals are implemented by the two countries and the two countries are accountable, through the articulation of milestones and timelines, as well as accountability to the milestones already in the Agreement.

I stress again the strong need and the strong role that the Agreement has played in binational coordination, especially now with current political dynamics, that need for ensuring the two countries work in harmony together on the shared resource is more critical than ever.

Specifically on whether or not...how the Agreement should be reviewed, the NGO community is in discussions right now to figure out how to advise you in more detail on how that should happen.

We are in concert, in unity together saying that yes, the Agreement must remain a vital, critical force in the region, it must be revived and it must be invigorated, but there are concerns that if the review was too broad, it could weaken the Agreement, or milestones and timelines could be lost, or the re-writing and the re-negotiation could take a very lengthy amount of time.

But there is also concern that because of so many of the emerging issues such as invasive species, that we shouldn't just keep it restricted to the scope that it was originally founded on.

So there is a lot of discussions happening and we do hope to provide more detailed recommendations to you as this process continues.

Certainly, the review should assess what has worked and what hasn't worked and how to overcome the obstacles that prevented more progress than has been made.

We'd like to also encourage you to ensure that the public have a strong role in the development and assessment of the Agreement's review and the

change therein. Perhaps citizens observers, as have been used in the '80s, should be appointed to the review process.

And again, to ensure that the ecosystem approach is taken, we do need to look not just in the Great Lakes basin, but into the St. Lawrence River ecosystem as well, and whether or not the Agreement needs to have a greater impact downstream, as well as assessing threats that are coming into the basin, such as air pollution and global warming.

Just in a conclusion, we are in a unique time in the region. I wasn't fortunate enough to be part of the activist community in the '70s, but this time now is being compared, that we are in a similar time of change.

It may not be occurring in the same way, but the momentum is building. It may not be through the same public outrising that has happened, but we have to learn how to harness the momentum that is there right now, perhaps by developing new strategies to do so.

And the issues that are impacting the Great Lakes do seem to be a little bit more complicated, more interrelated, more synergistic, and again, we may need to be developing new, progressive, preventative, coordinated strategies ramping up to address these critical problems.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the first step of this Water Quality Agreement review, and we do look forward to ongoing involvement in this critical process. Thank you.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you for your comments. Next, Maria Mabe.

MARIA MABE: Good evening. I thank you very much for this opportunity to provide public comment. My name again is Maria Mabe, I am member of the Seneca Nation, born into the Heron (?) Clan. I live along the Kadarakis (?) Creek, near the mountain. My territory surrounds that area.

One of your things up here spoke about some of the issues that I feel relevant to share with you. For one, I've lived downstream from the West Valley Nuclear Facility, where there is still barrels of waste at different levels of contamination that are buried in the ground without a liner, that still...there's a potential for hazard there because it is an eroding creek, the banks do fall off here and there.

And I feel that over my time with Great Lakes United that the issues of nuclear waste need to be addressed stronger, so that would probably be my first recommendation.

I'll tell you a little bit about myself, why I've done this work. Again, I was born on the reservation, I was adopted into a family of 12 and I still have close relationships with my other siblings, which there are six of them, so I have 18 brothers and sisters that are from this community.

And out of that, I've been fortunate to be blessed with about 70 nieces and nephews. Out of these children, the birth defects are not what I see in other healthier communities.

My nephews' penises (?)...I don't know the exact names at the moment, but there has been issues. There has been spina bifida. And my sister took her

vitamins, and different illnesses along the way, especially auto-immune diseases...

As kids, our parents tried to raise us so that we would grasp our culture and share it for generations to come. That's what they were taught to do and that's what they taught us.

And the prime source for their education was our creek. I remember vividly as a child...it's some of my favourite memories, when I need a place to just escape in my mind, so to speak, I still walk along that dirt road that takes us to the creek and laugh at my sisters because they love rhubarb and I couldn't stand it, enjoy picking the berries – I mean, we ate every kind of berry that was along there, we learned how to cook them in pies and what not – you know, testing each other with the different plants, do you know what that is for, you know, my sister would have a wart and we would say get the milkweed, you know, and it worked. These are things that we didn't have to contaminate ourselves with different medicines or what not unless they were really needed.

Another thing we did a lot of was eat fish. I remember catching my first rainbow and it being heavier than me and I could not pull it up over the bank. We learned how to use the clay that was along these banks to fold these fish up and put them in the hot rocks and cook them, and it was delicious. You know, and there was cornfields along the way, we learned to watch which ones were edible corn and which was cow corn – it was a hard lesson, but we learned it.

And it was a very enjoyable childhood, and it was a good life, and I enjoyed learning all of those lessons. And as I grew older, I enjoyed teaching them to my nieces and nephews and my younger brothers and sisters.

Consequently, I believe I am paying the price and that my family is as well. There is also a Superfund Site (?) upstream, it's called Peter Cooper Superfund Site. At one time, it was the largest glue factory and animal hide and whatever in the world. It was phenomenal.

I remember seeing the fuzz along the side and I remember the hides and I remember when the hides went away. I remember when they quit allowing them to dump into the creek.

I think that that was a false security for my family, thinking it was okay for us to be in the water again because they didn't see what was in there. The list of toxins that that place still puts into the water is extreme...the science friends that are more in the know of this thing tell me about the arsenic that still comes out.

This plant has been closed for over 20 years. EPA recently came up with a decision to leave it there. And it contaminates our creek, it contaminates Lake Erie.

We drink the water from Lake Erie, most of the residents of Lake Erie basin drink the water from Lake Erie. And not to clean that up when they have that opportunity and it's in the process is mind-boggling to me.

Communication has been really hard. It's been slow. The (inaudible) decision came out four days after the public comment was over. I think they must

be very brilliant people that they could review all that and effectively address it, and it does cause me some concern...it actually causes me a lot of concern, especially because the communication wasn't sent out to the public in a more obvious way.

So again, I strongly support the work the IJC has been doing over the years and I am really glad you were there, but I do see that we do need stronger controls. We need a stronger message to our governments.

The people that actually work there...not so much the bosses, because when I speak with them, they get it, but it's the civil employees that make the decisions a lot of the time has become a reality to me.

Why is this so important to me? Again, all of those children. I know all of their names, they all know me. You know, that's a lot of little children to know.

I got into this business because I became ill in my late thirties. When I was ready to have children, I was told no, you have too many fibroids, you have cysts on your ovaries, we need to remove the cysts and we need to remove your uterus.

That was hard for me. I have 70 children I can send back to their mothers. That's okay. Then I was diagnosed with colon cancer, and that was removed. I can live with that, that's okay. Now I'm being diagnosed with lupus, and I can't live with that. I can't cut it out and I don't know how to get rid of it.

I don't want to see these children have to go through the same thing. I don't want us to have to stop teaching them how to fish, how to hunt, how to live a good life, how to take care of Mother Nature.

I have a poem my mother gave me before she died. I've lost most of the elders in my life. I am like the matriarch of my family; I'm only 46, that's not right for that large of a family.

So this may sound a bit corny, but I would like to share this with you so you can have a perspective where myself and other indigenous people around the entire basin, why we do what we do, why we complain, why it's more emotional for us, why it's more closer.

It's called and Iroquois Thanksgiving. It was decided by our Creator that we should always give thanks whenever we gather for any reason. We turn our voices towards Him. And I do give thanks for this gathering tonight and turning our voices to you as well, and you being here.

And we talk about...we give thanks and we speak of the things that our Mother Earth gives us, those bushes, those grasses, those berries. I do appreciate they're there and I hope they keep being there.

We talk about the hanging fruit, the strawberry, the first fruit of the season, and the raspberry, which helps with our coming of children. The standing forest, and especially the maple, that gives us its sweet juice, which was recommended by an elder, that I start drinking the sap again in the spring as a tonic because of what I am going through.

And all of the animals that provide our food and clothing, and among them the deer. I've seen a deer with a big old tumour on the side of its neck, and I wonder about when we go hunting, what are we really eating? I know...I don't wonder, I know, but I can't, on the other hand, stop that.

We talk about the birds that fly over us and whose voices delight us. And I am so glad the eagles are coming back to my creek, so I know it's getting healthier. I realize that by their actions.

One thing we give thanks for the most is the lakes, the rivers and the streams that provide for our well-being. Almost all indigenous communities across the basin...reservations were in those sensitive areas, those wetlands along the waters, so we do feel it first. It affects us just as much as it does the animals.

We talk about our sustenance – corn, beans, and squash – upon who we live. People in my community are now afraid to be farmers because of what they'll be feeding their families.

On the other hand, they realize the pesticides and what not are on their foods that they buy from the markets. Our market used to be the creek, it used to be our gardens. In my lifetime, I've seen that go away.

We give thanks for the Creator's help, the helpers, those who are carrying on His responsibility and those ones that know about the plants and the medicines, and even they talk to me about where to get the medicines.

They're kind of concerned about getting medicines from my brothers from Akwesasne because their contamination levels are much higher than ours. Their

women's breast milk is contaminated. They have chosen to be the healthier lifestyles, to keep eating it and keep breast-feeding. I am not sure.

And we give thanks for our grandfathers the thunders who come from the West bringing rain to replenish the Great Lakes and the streams. That is also tied in with what we do in our industry and what we put up there is affecting those winds and what it does bring, the storms are stronger.

We give thanks for our elder brother the sun, who warms the wind and brings growth to the land, our grandmother the moon, who regulates the time and coming of children, our grandparents the stars, whose meaning our ancestors once knew and is lost, the wind, again, that comes from the place hidden by a veil that always blow moderately for us.

We combine together all of His helpers and put our minds into one and give our thanks for them. And so it will be in our minds, and now we carry our thanks all the way to our Creator, he who dwells in a sky road. He listening to us and watching us day and night.

We thank Him for all that he has given us, and I am very thankful to be a Great Lakes Indian and I am very thankful for you all to be here. Thank you.

IRENE BROOKS: Thank you, Maria. Thank you for sharing those comments and your poem. Governments will be meeting with First Nations and Tribes separately. They have decided to do that.

However, our meetings are open to everyone and we're really glad you came tonight. But I'm sure you'll be able to speak directly to governments as the review begins in the spring. But thank you very much for coming.

MARIA MABE: All right, thank you.

IRENE BROOKS: Is there anyone else that wishes to speak? That was the last sheet of paper that I had. Surely somebody has something they wish to say? Ah, come on, you can do it.

Well, they have been great comments. I must say that we have heard similar comments at other meetings, and you'll be able to see your remarks on our Web site and make sure we get them right.

If there are no other questions, you'll have another opportunity when governments begin the review in the spring, so you'll have another shot. We really appreciate you coming out and giving us your comments tonight.

And if there is no one else that wishes to speak, I'll wish you good evening...oops, I knew it.

ROBERT GOURD: I will speak...

IRENE BROOKS: Oh, we have a speaker.

RICHARD SHERRILL: I want to speak on a slightly different version. I live near Lake Erie, in Buffalo, but I also summer near Lake Huron, so I would...

IRENE BROOKS: Could we have your name just so we know who to attribute...

RICHARD SHERRILL: Richard Sherrill.

IRENE BROOKS: Richard Sherrill. Thank you.

RICHARD SHERRILL: So my concern has to do with the water in Lake Huron and the reduction in water, since it's down four to five feet over the last several years, through the outflow through the St. Clair River, and also the lack of fish through the last 10 to 15 years there. So I'm only expressing my concern. Thank you.

IRENE BROOKS: Okay, thank you. Thank you very much. If you get home tonight and find something else you want to add to your comments, you can e-mail us, write to us, call us up. Any other comments? Going once, going twice. Again, thank you very much for coming.

ROBERT GOURD: I must say, before you all leave, that of course, being the Canadian side of the history (?), this is music to my ears, what you have all said tonight.

I have happened to be on the Commission since '98, when I was first appointed, and what I hear today and tonight is exactly what we've been pushing for for the past years.

Invasive species, for instance, is so much on our minds and is so much on my mind, that when I first joined the Commission in '98, that was my first preoccupation. And we're very worried about invasive...

(TAPE CHANGES SIDES)

...and it's increasing. And I thank you very much for the documentation you gave me. I will look into it very thoroughly. Thank you very much. It was

very nice to be here. Even though Rochester is not the greater weather, we were pleased to be...I was pleased to be here, anyhow.

IRENE BROOKS: (LAUGHS) So was I. I still am. Again, thank you.
