

The Honorable John D. Dingell's remarks at the National Wildlife Federation Annual Meeting

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
THE HONORABLE JOHN D. DINGELL
National Wildlife Federation Annual Meeting
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Thank you, Larry [Schweiger], for your kind words and for inviting me to take part in NWF's 71st Annual Meeting. I want you to know how much I and along with so many of my colleagues appreciate all you do to protect our planet, our wilderness and wetlands, our wildlife and, most importantly, our children's future.

I'm delighted to welcome you all to Washington. And I'm grateful for the opportunity to join with more than 300 of our country's most committed and inspiring volunteers.

Every person in this room devotes great skill, energy and substantial free time to protecting our environment. Many of you give of yourself in the most challenging of circumstances. You provide support to projects that although hugely important - are often under-funded and under-staffed. I know that there are more demands on your time than you could possibly meet. Yet you make remarkable things happen.

I want you to know that your contributions do not go unnoticed. You are part of an environmental movement that has accomplished extraordinary things and inspired some of the most important legislation to come out of the U.S. Congress.

As stewards of our future, I know you have a strong interest in what we in Congress are doing to honor, sustain and protect our planet.

Larry and I have spoken at length about some of your key concerns. And, this morning, we have an opportunity to discuss a particular issue that I know is top of mind for this group and for many of us on Capitol Hill: climate change.

Since the beginning of this year, the Committee on Energy and Commerce has been working hard to better understand climate change and identify ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And we're working aggressively to find legislative solutions that will protect the health of our environment without compromising our economic strength.

The Committee has conducted 10 climate change hearings since mid-February.

We've heard from some fifty witnesses including business leaders, environmental experts, elected officials, leading academics and, of course, former Vice President Al Gore.

We have solicited input from business, labor and environmental organizations. And we are taking their responses into account as we move forward in drafting policy.

All this work on climate change has driven a great deal of media coverage and spawned literally hundreds of news articles. Most importantly, it's helped the American public better understand a very complex and critical issue.

Although a lot of work remains to be done before we assemble a legislative package, I am confident that the Committee on Energy and Commerce will forge legislation that is fair, effective and passable. It will require a lot of hard work and compromise. But some of you may recall that we've been through this before.

In 1990, after 13 years of hard fought and difficult negotiation, the House passed the Clean Air Act Amendments by an overwhelming margin. Though the process of producing this legislation was strenuous, its success has been remarkable.

This time around, we don't have 13 years to take on the problem of climate change.

Although I'm not yet certain what legislative remedies are needed, I know that the solution begins with our collective resolve to work together and craft reasonable, realistic policy that takes our energy needs into account and does not pit our economy against our ecosystem.

But Congress can't tackle this alone. We need people like you -- those who give of themselves each day for the sake of our environment and the benefit of the next generation of Americans.

We welcome you to the table as we determine how to move forward in a way that best protects our environment, meets our energy needs and reduced our dependence on fossil fuels.

When it comes to the issue of climate change, I know you have a lot to say. And I look forward to hearing your thoughts and questions. But before we begin our Q&A session, I want to briefly mention one more issue I know is also of great importance to this group.

This year, Congress has the chance to build upon the National Wilderness Act and do something historic to better protect our environment and our wildlife. Last year, we created an incentive that encourages voluntary conservation donations. We allowed landowners to make donations while, in turn, retiring development rights.

This new policy is an important step toward better protecting our wildlife, as well as our scenic and historic resources. It has triggered landowner-led conservation efforts on millions of acres of land. But the law is set to expire at the end of this year.

Congressman Mike Thompson and my Michigan colleague Congressman Dave Camp want to make the incentive permanent law. I commend them for this. That's why I have signed on as a co-sponsor of this legislation and pledged to do all I can to help them. And, today, I ask all of you to do the same -- and to keep up your efforts to protect our wilderness and wildlife.

You can also be sure that I will protect and enforce the laws already on the books. I plan to work to protect the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the other critical laws that could become prime targets in the crosshairs of our political adversaries.

I also intend to do everything I can to protect one of the most important policy measures I've worked on during my 50 years in Congress -- the Endangered Species Act.

This legislation is in danger. We have learned that the Administration wants gut this sacred law. And we have put them on notice that - as one of the sponsors of this legislation - I am watching their actions very closely, and I intend to fiercely defend the ESA and its intentions.

This is about much more than protecting a single policy. To me, this is about protecting every bald eagle, every grizzly bear, every gray wolf and every animal once or currently on the endangered species list.

If our actions to protect ESA save one species from extinction, we've had an impact on this planet for generations. I can't think of a more meaningful or noble pursuit. And I ask for your support in this work.

I also ask that we keep up this conversation and continue to work together -- even after you return to the critical work you do all across the country. When it come to addressing climate change, your interest -- and your involvement -- is so important.

Thank you all for being a part of this discussion. I look forward to your questions.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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