

Super Tuesday State Legislators Challenge Candidates to Restore Great Lakes, Outlaw Water Diversions

LANSING, MICH. (January 31) – Republican and Democratic state legislators from states representing more than a quarter of the delegates at stake on Super Tuesday today called on presidential candidates to commit to funding the restoration of the Great Lakes and to outlawing water diversions.

The Great Lakes states of New York, Illinois and Minnesota represent 457 of the 1,688 delegates up for grabs on Super Tuesday.

State legislators from these states—Rep. Karen May (D-Ill.), Sen. George Maziarz (R-N.Y.), and Sen. Ann Rest (D-Minn.), together with Sen. Patty Birkholz (R-Mich.), chair of the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, today sent a letter to the leading presidential candidates urging them to support the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact and to implement the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy.

“For state legislators who are on the front lines in the battle to restore and protect the lakes, we have one question for each presidential candidate: ‘Will you use your leadership as President to pass Great Lakes restoration legislation and to outlaw water diversions?’” said Sen. Birkholz of Michigan, which held its primary on January 15th. “We’re looking for presidential candidates who will not turn their backs on the lakes, because every day we wait, the problems get worse and the solutions get more costly.”

The Great Lakes Compact would ban diversions and establish fair and consistent rules for Great Lakes water use that everyone must follow. State legislatures across the region are in the process of approving the Great Lakes Compact, which will also require U.S. Congressional approval.

The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy outlines an action plan of manageable solutions to protect and restore the Great Lakes from threats like sewage overflows and invasive species. State legislators have been active in working to implement priority recommendations of the strategy, with Michigan passing a law to combat the threat of invasive species from ocean going ships and several other states pursuing similar initiatives.

“From Niagara Falls to the Thousand Islands, the Great Lakes are essential to the economic and cultural identity of millions of New Yorkers, who expect the next president to not abandon the lakes in this time of need,” said Sen. Maziarz (R-N.Y.). “Protecting and restoring the Great Lakes is about more than protecting the environment. It is also about stimulating our economy and safeguarding a way of life.”

A Brookings Institution study found implementing the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy would lead to at least \$80 billion in regional economic benefit.

Today's initiative by state legislators follows similar challenges put forward by the region's governors, mayors, and members of the U.S. Congress, who have all brought attention to the problems facing the Great Lakes and the need for presidential candidates to outline their commitments.

"When it comes to the Great Lakes, the current administration has dropped the ball. I expect presidential candidates to demonstrate their support for implementing manageable solutions to protect and restore the Great Lakes," said Rep. May (D-Ill.) "In what is turning out to be a very competitive race for both the Democratic and Republican nomination, aspirants for the White House should realize support for the Great Lakes will translate into a wave of support from voters."

The Great Lakes continue to be threatened by sewage overflows, invasive species and water loss.

"As lake levels drop and new invasive species enter the lakes, Minnesota voters want to hear what presidential candidates have to say about protecting and restoring the Great Lakes," said Sen. Rest (D-Minn.). "They could start by supporting the Great Lakes Compact and signing the candidate pledge being circulated by members of Congress."

State legislators are looking to get presidential candidates to sign the pledge, as well as commit to outlawing water diversion of the Great Lakes.

"We're looking for presidential hopefuls to stand up and commit to outlawing water diversions of the Great Lakes," said Molly Flanagan, water program manager for the National Wildlife Federation's Great Lakes office. "Diverting water from the Great Lakes would be like allowing special interests to turn the Grand Canyon into a quarry. The next president must get behind the Great Lakes Compact so that we can establish fair and consistent rules that everyone must follow."

"We're looking for presidential candidates who will not stand by idly as sewage contamination, invasive species and water loss weaken the health of the Great Lakes," said Jeff Skelding, national campaign director for the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. "We have solutions to these issues. It is time to use them on behalf of the millions of people who depend on the lakes for their jobs and quality of life."

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