

Canada - United States
Inter-Parliamentary Group
Canadian Section



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Section canadienne

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the 62nd Annual Meeting of the
Midwestern Legislative Conference**

Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

**Traverse City, Michigan, United States of America
August 26-29, 2007**

Report

The Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference dealt with a number of topics of particular interest to Canada. These included: Great Lakes Issues; Midwest-Canada Relations (including the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative –WHTI); and Energy. These topics are outlined below.

A. Great Lakes Issues

Discussions focused on the key issues facing policy makers in the Great Lakes Basin, including efforts to combat invasive species, the impact of changing water levels in the Great Lakes, and the proposed Great Lakes –St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact.

Invasive Species

On the issue of combating invasive species, discussants stressed that aquatic invasive species such as the Asian Carp, Zebra Mussel, and Sea Lamprey have been increasing steadily in number over the past 15 years with about 80% of “invasions” caused by overseas ships discharging ballast water into the Great Lakes. At present there are 185 nonindigenous species (NIS) in the Great Lakes.

The impact of invasive species is felt in terms of the economy (e.g., the clogging of facility pipes at water treatment plants, and water systems at manufacturing facilities) by destroying commercial fisheries and negatively impacting recreational areas and the ecology of the region (e.g., decline of certain fish species). It has been estimated that it takes approximately \$15 million annually to try to combat the sea Lamprey.

In an attempt to address this problem participants suggested the following actions:

- keep up the pressure for ballast water standards –legislation, regulation, enforcement;
- develop green technologies;
- enact threat assessment and prevention measures;
- develop public education and outreach;
- restore native species and habitat; and,
- fund research targeted at real progress.

Groundwater

Regarding the topic of groundwater (water that is held in the soil and pervious rocks), the discussions centered on the importance of this resource to the Great Lakes region. Participants stressed that ground water is important to ecosystems in the region because it is, in effect, a large, subsurface reservoir from which water is released slowly to provide a reliable minimum level of water flow to streams, lakes and wetlands. The Great Lakes ecosystem is made up not only of the lakes themselves, but also of the complex network of tributaries and groundwater on which the lakes depend.

Participants cited four major groundwater issues in region. These are:

- the quantity of groundwater;
- groundwater and surface water interaction;
- changes in groundwater quality as development expands; and
- ecosystem health in relation to quantity and quality of water.

It was stressed in this session that a better understanding of these issues is required in order to ensure an adequate supply of quality water in the future. To this end, the State of Michigan established the GROUNDWATER CONSERVATION ADVISORY COUNCIL in 2003 in order to bring “science” and “reason” to the study of this issue and to examine such issues as the impact of water withdrawal from the Great Lakes. Participants were urged to look at this approach to see whether or not it had applicability in their states or provinces.

Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact

Of particular interest to the delegates from both Canada and the United States were the discussions on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact. On December 13, 2005, the Great Lakes Governors and the Premiers of Ontario and Quebec signed the *Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement*, and the Governors endorsed the companion *Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact*.

The Agreement and the Compact detail how the States and the Provinces will manage and protect the Basin. In order to become law in the United States, each of the eight Great Lakes State legislatures must ratify the Compact. Congress must also give its consent. After this, the Compact will become both State and Federal law. In order for the Agreement to become law in Ontario and Quebec, the provinces must amend their statutes and regulations as appropriate. No federal legislation is required in Canada.

Speakers outlined to the participants the main elements of the Compact which include:

- economic development to be fostered through the sustainable use and responsible management of Basin waters;
- banning new water diversions although strictly regulated and limited exceptions could be allowed, such as for public water supply purposes in communities near the Basin;
- utilizing a consistent standard by the States to review proposed uses of Basin water;
- development by the States and Provinces of regional goals and objectives for water conservation and efficiency which will be reviewed every five years. As well, each State and Province will develop and implement a water conservation and efficiency program;
- collection of technical data which will be shared by all participants; and,

- a strong commitment to continued public participation in the implementation of the agreement.

The Great Lakes States and Provinces have made some progress towards putting the Agreement and Compact into action. Minnesota and Illinois ratified the Compact this year with the other Great Lakes States moving towards implementation. In June 2007, Ontario passed the *Safeguarding and Sustaining Ontario's Water Act* which fulfils its commitment to pass legislation implementing the Agreement. The Quebec National Assembly approved the Agreement in 2006 and is taking further steps to fully implement the terms.

Participants strongly supported these initiatives and encouraged the full implementation of the Compact as soon as possible.

B. Midwest-Canada Relations

Participants in this session focussed their discussions on two issues, namely, building a stronger bilateral regional economy and the implementation of the western hemisphere travel initiative (WHTI).

Building a Stronger Bilateral Regional Economy

The discussions on building a stronger bilateral regional economy centered on strengthening what is already a world-leading bi-national economic region. Presentations stressed that this region (i.e., the Canada-US Great Lakes Region): is in transition from an industrial to a knowledge – based economy; has a central role in US-Canadian economic competitiveness; and regional leadership can advance a winning economic strategy.

Participants emphasized that the region has tremendous assets and infrastructure which can be leveraged to attain success in today's global knowledge economy. It is home to leading global business sectors (e.g., energy, transport, IT, bio-science etc), numerous educational institutes (20 of the 100 top-ranked universities in the world) and is developing the next generation of advanced manufacturing (e.g., robotics, nanotechnology). In addition, it already has a huge marketplace with a highly integrated economy with Ontario resulting in the Great Lakes region having the third largest GDP in the world.

In order to “grow” the region in the future, discussants outlined a blueprint which calls for:

- enhancing R&D in the Great Lakes region;
- developing a shared economic strategy for the US-Canada Great Lakes region;
- providing state, provincial and federal funding to commercialize new technologies in the region;
- developing the infrastructure (e.g., roads, border crossings) to enhance the bi-national marketplace; and
- building on the unique natural features of the region such as water-based recreation and tourism and expanded port activities.

This session ended with delegates stating that these actions were crucial to the future viability of the region and that without them, there would be a decline in regions' abilities to remain a "vital center" in the global marketplace.

Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)

This session was of particular interest to the Canadian delegates because of the economic and social implications of introducing stricter entry requirements for people crossing the Canada-United States land border. The discussions centered on the type of documentation that will be required by the United States for persons entering the US through this border.

The first phase of the WHTI requiring passports for people entering the US from Canada by air (including both US and Canadian citizens), began in January 2007. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is moving towards the implementation of the second phase in the process, requiring that US and Canadian citizens show a passport or other authorized travel document when entering the US by land border and sea, sometime in 2008.

The conference delegates concentrated their discussions on what the "other authorized travel document" might be. Rather than a passport, many felt that an "enhanced driver's licence" (such as the one being developed by Washington State) would be the most practical alternative. Such a licence would carry more information than is presently the case and likely have some sort of personal identifier encoded on the licence. It was also pointed out that, even with the drivers licence alternative, there would still be significant costs for its implementation and for the required infrastructure to support this initiative.

It was clear from the participants that they did not want to see the states and the provinces responsible for funding the entire cost of a new secure identification document. They called upon the federal governments in both countries to fully fund whatever requirements either government may make regarding the WHTI.

C. Energy

Participants in this session held discussions on renewable energy and energy efficiency in the region.

Renewable Energy

Delegates emphasized the fact that the Midwest region was uniquely positioned to address the nation's need for renewable energy. Such energy sources as wind and bio-fuels such as ethanol are abundant in the region. The development of these resources benefits the environment, helps ensure energy independence and has tremendous economic implications for the area.

In the case of ethanol production, it was pointed out that this can lead to a value-added crop that can be exported from the region, increase the income of the region's farmers, pay dividends to local investors and lead to the creation of well paying manufacturing jobs. It was also noted that while some expansion of economic growth can be expected by developing renewable energy resources we do yet fully understand how large this growth will be.

Participants agreed that increased production and use of bio-fuels and renewable energy sources provides a unique opportunity for rural economic growth to communities in the Midwest. The challenge, as the delegates saw it, will be to coordinate renewable energy policy among the Midwest states to maximize this growth and move towards greater energy independence in the future. To this end, the North Central Bio-Economy Consortium (NCBEC – made up of 11 Midwest states) was created in April 2007, with a mission to identify and jointly act upon opportunities to ensure the region's move towards greater energy independence, utilization of biomass feed stocks and the development of robust bio-economies. NCBEC's current activities include: advancing state, regional and federal renewable energy policies; coordinating regional research; serving as a regional clearing house for research; and, serving as a resource for policy makers. This initiative was met with a very favourable response from this session's participants.

Energy Efficiency

Discussions in this session centered on the fact that, increasingly, states and provinces are turning to energy efficiency to help reduce their energy needs. Delegates stated that a key element in this effort is to establish an effective and reasonable regional energy policy for the Midwest which includes region-wide energy efficiency programs.

The Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA – made up of diverse stakeholders including academia, manufacturers, state and local governments, energy and utilities firms etc.) told the delegates that if the region's states were to commit to vigorous energy efficiency programs, by 2012, the Midwest region could potentially attain:

- \$4.5 billion in direct natural gas savings;
- \$6.8 billion in direct energy savings;
- \$4.2 billion in price savings due to natural gas price reduction; and
- 30,000 new jobs.

To achieve these goals, participants discussed:

- establishing region-wide energy programs which include efficiency standards and targets as well as long-term funding for the programs;
- increasing energy efficiency in new and existing buildings by adopting the 2006 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) which ensures that all new homes meet minimum efficiency standards;
- setting minimum efficiency standards for appliances; and
- leading by example – for example, increase efficiency in existing state buildings.

The delegates believed if they could work towards achieving these goals the Midwest region could attain a much better level of energy efficiency than is presently the case and enjoy the economic, environmental and social benefits that result from such an effort.

Conclusion

The overriding theme of the sessions was that the states and provinces must take a more regional, integrated approach to solving the region's problems. This includes a bi-national effort, especially when dealing with Great Lakes and border security issues. The delegates stressed that if this approach was adopted, the area would be a leader in developing an expanded economy while addressing the social and environmental issues facing state, provincial and federal governments.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Jerahmiel Grafstein, Senator
Co-Chair, Canada-United States
Inter-Parliamentary Group

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Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group
ACTIVITY	62 nd Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference
DESTINATION	Traverse City, Michigan United States of America
DATES	August 26-29, 2007
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Ø
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Hon. Joe Comuzzi, M.P.
STAFF	Daniel Charbonneau Executive Secretary John Christopher, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$2,245.50
ACCOMMODATION	\$2,170.37
HOSPITALITY	\$Ø
PER DIEMS	\$652.28
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$Ø
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$965.34
TOTAL	\$6,033.49