

Not life, but a good life, is to be chiefly valued.

-Socrates

The four Cornerstones to a Healthy Environment: Clean Air, Clean Water, Prudent Land Use, and People Who Care

Clean Air

Air pollution in Illinois continues at unacceptable levels.

Illinois must accept the scientific fact that global warming—the increase of the earth’s temperature—is caused by what are known as “greenhouse gases” and the widespread deforestation of trees that absorb carbon dioxide.

A plethora of studies have linked air pollution to health problems. Among the major contributors to air pollution in Illinois are the old coal-fired power plants that were exempt from new pollution standards contained in the Clean Air Act in the 70s. **Illinois must establish a more progressive and proactive schedule to reduce global warming and lung disease caused by air pollution.**

Very recently, I supported the successful passage of Senate Bill 2169. This bill is a great sign for the State of Illinois, its residents, its economy, and its environment. This bill will build a state-of-the-art coal gasification facility in downstate Illinois. This facility will convert coal to quality natural gas and is projected to create 1,650 new jobs. Furthermore, carbon emissions are expected to reduce dramatically. I am very proud of the framework in this bill, but there it is not a cure-all solution to the environmental problems we face. It is a large step in the right direction, but we can continue do more on every governing level. *We need* to continue to do more for the health of our citizens and for the health of the environment.

To protect our personal health and to ensure clean air and water, Illinois must establish a detailed and more inclusive schedule for the reduction of air pollutants.

We should, therefore, follow through with updating the technology of electric plants and locations where electricity is produced. **Illinois should require that, after all this time, that old power plants meet “New Source Standards.”** That is, older plants should

adopt more environmentally friendly technology, including retrofitting their smoke stacks with scrubbers.

Clean Water

Fresh water is essential for survival on Earth. The surface of our planet is about one-third water. Of all the water on Earth only about one percent is available to us for our use. All forms of life that depend on fresh water must share from this same small percentage.

In order to keep our water supply clean and available, it is essential that we address all threats to clean water.

A new and growing threat to our water supply is Non-Point Source Pollution. This type of water pollution is difficult to address because pollutants come from many different sources and are difficult to trace. An example of Non-Point Source Pollution would be pollutants reaching a body of water via the streets and storm sewers. Road salt, for example, is a Non-Point Source Pollutant. An aggravating factor to Non Point Source Pollution is the issue of detention and retention ponds in new developments. A specific concern related to these ponds is how they are cared for after the development is complete. These detention ponds are often replacing small wetlands found on the development site. These ponds drain directly into our streams, rivers and lakes and do little to enhance water quality. To quote Oliver Wendell Holmes, “*A river is more than an amenity – it is a treasure.*” Recognizing that man made detention ponds create more water quality issues than they solve, Illinois must provide local municipalities incentives to preserve the number of smaller more diversified wetlands.

Open Space and Urban Sprawl

Land Use

When people work together on issues, success follows. Bringing government agencies, including natural resource conservation professionals, local residents, special interest groups and lawmakers to the same table has long been a goal. The availability of state funds to assist projects that were planned in this manner will provide for more sustainable

development. Compromises will be reached, and Illinois residents will be happier. Land use is at the heart of long term planning. The decision as to how open space should be made available for homes, industrial sites and recreational parks should be made in the presence of several agencies and interest groups with the support of State funding to assist with final projects.

We also need to decrease the rate at which we use landfills. Landfills are not beneficial for the environment and are also harmful for human health. Communities can decrease landfill expansion and decrease the creation of new landfills by establishing Zero-Waste, comprehensive recycling programs. These programs ensure that nothing we leave on curb is diverted to landfills. The State should provide generous support for municipalities to implement Zero-Waste, comprehensive recycling programs. New recycling programs and facilities will also create new jobs throughout the state of Illinois. Successful comprehensive recycling programs have been implemented in cities and towns all over the United States. **State funds should be offered locally to assist communities with their long term planning, especially in supporting efforts towards comprehensive recycling programs in municipalities.**

Our soils

Northern Illinois boasts some of the most fertile soils in our nation. Yet valuable farmland is being bought and replaced with high-density housing, industrial parks and shopping malls. Fertile topsoil is stripped, put in bags and sold at local garden centers, never to be as productive again. With the population of Illinois continuing to increase, we cannot continue to expect to maintain the historically high level of exports of corn, soybeans and other grains while continuing to strip our most fertile farmlands.

Illinois must embark upon a bold initiative to revitalize our inner cities and to more prudently plan for less invasive growth of our more rural areas.

Biodiversity

Nobel Laureate George Bernard Shaw said, “*The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that’s the essence of inhumanity.*”

Loss of the Biodiversity and our natural history is something our state can no longer afford. Habitat destruction, introduction of invasive alien species, and fragmentation of our natural lands has led to incredible losses in Illinois's ecosystems. To counteract these assaults, more state funding is needed to protect open space, acquire additional land and support restoration efforts. **Illinois must develop public policy that further supplements the Endangered Species Act and provides localized protection as needed.** This legislation should highlight and publicize the use of “Best Management Practices.”

Energy Conservation

Illinois must establish and support efforts that espouse and educate citizens about the importance of increasing our energy independence. This can be achieved by encouraging more efforts towards conserving current energy, changing our energy-consumption culture in the workplace and at home, and working with schools to develop curricula that foster attitudes in line with energy conservation and environmental stewardship. **Illinois must strive to continue developing alternative energy sources such as wind, hydroelectricity, recycling and hydrogen power systems that generate electricity for our homes, schools and businesses without polluting the environment.** The strides we have made are commendable, but we must continue to improve, innovate, and evaluate the new technologies we have implemented.

We must aim to reduce our use of nuclear energy despite the possibility that we may be dependent upon this source of power over the near term. Nonetheless, we must develop a realistic timeline to reduce our dependence on this type of power and ensure safer disposal process to store its byproducts (spent plutonium, etc.). Illinois must begin educating consumers and teaching its young people that Fossil Fuels are both harmful old-fashioned. We must encourage our citizens to embrace alternative sources of energy and implement a realistic timeline on which nuclear energy can be phased out.

We would be wise to heed the words of the German physicist G. C. Lichtenberg, “*I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I can say is they must change if they are to get better.*” State agencies and other governmental agencies at the county and municipal level must lead the way if things are to get better by requesting bids

on alternative-fueled cars and trucks. We must continue to promote new technologies emerging from auto manufactures such as the use of bio-diesel in trucks, more efficient gasoline motors, hybrid cars, as well as utilization of public transportation. Car-pooling and high occupancy lanes on freeways are just some of the many small but doable ways to reduce air pollution and energy consumption. Environmental mindfulness can be promoted through public education, tax incentives, and proper planning. In the words of Shakespeare, “*It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.*”

Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of state and local policies. The State of Illinois must be committed to protecting human health and the environment. Responsible protection of the environment ensures the protection of human health. **Illinois must educate and empower its communities in the creation of partnerships for clean sustainable communities and environmental justice.**

Education

None of the above-mentioned issues can be addressed without also supporting the need for education and outreach. Conservation agencies, municipalities, private citizens, special interest groups, and schools must continue to coordinate—not only discuss all of these issues—but to *do* something about them.

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “*There are many ways of moving forward, but only one way of standing still.*”