

3-11-1991

Comments on Resource Recovery and Conservation Act, National League of Cities

Max S. Baucus

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches

Recommended Citation

Baucus, Max S., "Comments on Resource Recovery and Conservation Act, National League of Cities" (March 11, 1991). *Max S. Baucus Speeches*. 455.

https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches/455

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives and Special Collections at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Max S. Baucus Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Printing, Graphics & Direct Mail
ONBASE SYSTEM

Indexing Form

Senator * or Department*: **BAUCUS**

Instructions:

Prepare one form for insertion at the beginning of each record series.

Prepare and insert additional forms at points that you want to index.

For example: at the beginning of a new folder, briefing book, topic, project, or date sequence.

Record Type*: **Speeches & Remarks**

MONTH/YEAR of Records*: **March-1991**

(Example: JANUARY-2003)

(1) Subject*: **Environment**

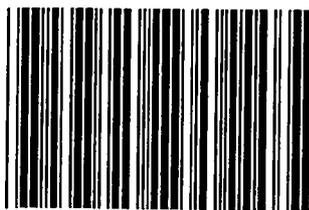
(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

(2) Subject* **Comments on the Resource Recovery and Conservation Act**

DOCUMENT DATE*: **03/11/1991**

(Example: 01/12/1966)

* "required information"



BAUCUS

COMMENTS BY SENATOR MAX BAUCUS ON THE RESOURCE RECOVERY AND
CONSERVATION ACT

National League of Cities
March 11, 1991

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here.

Let me first say that I hope this is but the start of a good working relationship between us as the Congress begins work on a number of complex environmental issues.

Also, let me thank all of you for the help that the National League of Cities gave us last year on the Clean Air Act, especially on the municipal incinerator provisions.

But while that law will give us all cleaner air to breathe, it's too soon to breathe a sigh of relief yet. For there is much work left to do.

This year, the Environment and Public Works Committee will have the reauthorization of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act high on its agenda. So too will be the reauthorization of the Clean Water Act. And in addition, the committee will be working on the Surface Transportation Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Much of the Committee's agenda will also bear on the development of a national energy strategy. As you know, the Administration has announced its plan. Senator Johnston has introduced his bill and is already well into hearings on it.

And Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell has established a task force of the Democratic Conference to examine a comprehensive energy strategy.

In the Environmental Protection Subcommittee, we will begin hearings later this week on some of the broader environmental implications of a national energy plan. And there are many.

This session today is nominally devoted to solid waste. Yet it could just as easily be on energy, since municipal trash is an authentic source of domestic energy. And not just from incineration, either. Waste reduction and recycling programs can contribute greatly to energy savings in many industries -- aluminum, glass, plastics, and paper.

Perhaps more importantly, encouraging recycling will also encourage a positive environmental ethic that can pay even greater dividends in reducing energy consumption in a variety of areas, from transportation to food service. Even in our daily lives.

And make no mistake about it, reducing energy consumption,

whether through efficiency or conservation, is the key to ridding our economy of its dependence on foreign oil and its resulting competitive disadvantages.

Now increasing domestic production from areas already under lease is an important part of any comprehensive energy strategy. But let's face it. The U.S. simply cannot produce its way to independence. Not with the Persian Gulf countries sitting atop most of the world's oil reserves, not counting Iraq or Kuwait.

Of course, energy is not the only problem facing us, as you know. Not when we throw out enough garbage to cover Washington, DC with five hundred feet of trash every six months.

Now, that may have an intuitive appeal to some of you. But unfortunately, like our past approach to the solid waste problem, it avoids coming to grips with the real issue.

Since RCRA was first passed in 1976, the focus of the program has been on managing our waste. It sounds responsible. And it is. But it misses the point. If we simply continue to manage our problem, we will never solve it.

The solution will come with a commitment to a new hierarchy of solid waste management. A commitment first to reduce our generation of waste and then to recycle and compost as much as we can. Only then should we look to burning the remainder for energy recovery or burying it in environmentally sound landfills.

That first step has proven to be the hardest in the past. Fortunately, our national concern with energy and the growing awareness of the environment give us a renewed opportunity to address it.

It will take innovative ideas and some new thinking to bring this about. For example, are there ways to meld market forces with government regulation in creative ways that will achieve our goals sooner and at less cost? I think there are.

We saw it happen last year in the Clean Air Act. The whole emissions trading concept evolved from a need to reduce air pollutants in the most cost effective manner. Government regulation would not have done it alone. Neither would private markets. But together, there is the chance for truly cost effective solutions to a serious environmental problem.

There are similar opportunities in solid waste. For example, California is considering a charge on materials that will reflect their disposal cost. And some cities already have adopted charges for trash removal service that vary with the amount of garbage produced.

Both these ideas combine regulation and economic incentives in ways that will reduce the amount of waste we deal with.

The important point here is not any specific action. Rather it is a willingness to look creatively at the problem to see if new solutions can be developed. After all, innovation holds the best chance of breaking the technical and political gridlock that has sometimes stymied our best traditional efforts.

I have heard from a number of state and local agencies about the programs that work best for them. And some of those ideas will become part of the legislation.

But I don't want to leave any stone unturned in the search for creative ideas. I invite your suggestions. The more heads we have working on this, the better.

Of course, not all ideas may be right for all situations. Once the goals are established, we need to provide maximum flexibility to the states and cities in meeting them. But the key element is meeting the goal.

In the next few weeks, I, along with Senator Chafee, the ranking Republican on the committee, will be introducing a comprehensive RCRA reauthorization. It will be, I hope, thoughtful, as well as thought-provoking.

It is intended to promote discussion among state and local officials, interest groups, and industry. It will be the starting point for a series of hearings the subcommittee will have beginning next month. I hope to see many of you there.

One of the issues that we must deal with in this legislation is the interstate transport of waste. For too many years, some states and communities have been forced to take trash from another state. It has become a highly charged issue in many of those jurisdictions.

Last year, the Senate voted 69 to 31 to allow states to ban waste from other states. Now, allowing states to ban wastes, or to collect higher disposal fees, may alleviate the symptoms.

But it may not address the underlying problem, which is that some states do not do enough to provide for their own waste disposal needs.

A sound federal policy would provide incentives for all states to take more responsibility for managing their own problems. In return, they would have greater authority.

I mentioned earlier that waste reduction would be a cornerstone of the new RCRA bill. There are a number of ways to go about this.

We should encourage the elimination of excess packaging.

We should foster the reduction of toxic materials in products

and packages.

And we should support the reformulation of industrial processes to minimize the generation of waste.

Some cities are already travelling down these roads. We should encourage more to do the same.

The federal role in waste reduction should be to provide the tools to help states and cities accomplish the task. For instance, industries can be required to develop and implement plans to reduce their waste volume.

Product and packaging standards can be established to facilitate the re-use or recycling of materials. Financial incentives and technical assistance also can be used to help smaller plants or industries reduce their waste streams.

With the proper mix of incentives and mandates, I am sure that industry can make great strides in minimizing the amount of waste generated in manufacturing their products.

The second critical element of a sound solid waste policy is to recycle materials and not discard them after just one use. In the United States, we recycle only 13 percent of our trash. And while we recycle over 50 percent of aluminum beverage containers, only about one percent of our plastics get a similar treatment. We must do better.

But it is too simplistic to require an overall recycling rate of, say, 25 percent in five years. Or 50 percent in ten years.

As anyone who has studied it will tell you, each commodity must be dealt with individually if you are to maximize the amount of recycling. Each commodity needs different incentives. Each is at a different stage of market development.

We have to tailor our requirements to optimize the overall recycling rate at a level that is sustainable over the long haul. Short-term fixes are liable to do more harm than good.

One proven means of stimulating recycling markets is requiring minimum standards for the amount of recycled material in certain products. That is already working in the newsprint area.

Another is having governments buy products containing recycled materials. Many state and local governments do this now. And more are starting. It is time that the federal government -- and its contractors -- stepped up their efforts, too.

Education is also a powerful tool to raise the level of recycling in a community. But again, for education to be successful, the basic recycling infrastructure must be present. Otherwise, it is little more than a passing fad.

Finally, after we have reduced the amount of waste generated to

a minimum, and recycled as much as we can, then we must manage the remainder. Currently, there are no federal standards for managing waste facilities.

I believe there should be. All waste sites -- from municipal landfills to non-hazardous industrial waste lagoons -- should meet basic environmental standards.

This will help ensure that wastes are safely managed. It will also ensure that no area becomes a pollution haven. And, perhaps just as important, it will help restore public confidence in waste management.

The solid waste problems confronting this nation defy simple solutions. The problems are complex and they are interrelated. They have created a political gridlock and a planning nightmare for some of you already. And few of the rest are immune.

Fashioning strong, comprehensive solid waste legislation surely will require time and effort. But even more it will require ingenuity and creativity.

Some of that innovation will come from the insights and experience many of you in this room have gained from your years on the front line of the trash crisis. I hope you will share your ideas with us.

Together, we can begin the transition from managing our solid waste problems to actually reducing them.

Thank you. And I look forward to working with you in the coming months.

!R! RES; FONT 6; EXIT;