

Good News on the Environment

By Representative Glenn Grothman

As the legislature moves forward with the Job's Creation Bill designed to streamline Wisconsin's air emission permitting process, certain extreme environmental groups are putting pressure on Governor Doyle to veto the bills. The bill had been negotiated with Department of Natural Resources staff present to assure no risk to Wisconsin's environment would take place. Since the Governor's staff negotiated the bill, he will of course sign it.

This would be a good time to review the progress made the past thirty years regarding air pollution. A poll last year showed two-thirds of Americans believe air pollution has gotten worse over the past ten years. A similar number feel things will continue to get worse. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In the past twenty-five years, the Environmental Protection Agency has kept track of six criteria pollutants under the Clean Air Act. All have shown substantial reductions. Ozone has gone down 33 percent. Sulfur dioxide is down 67 percent. Nitrogen dioxide is down 42 percent. Particulates are down 27 percent in thirteen years. Carbon monoxide is down 72 percent and lead is down 97 percent. This is all the more amazing in that both the size of the U.S. economy and the amount of miles driven in this country is about two and half times what it was 25 years ago.

The same is true locally. While the local media report ozone action days, the number of days in which test sites in Southeastern Wisconsin actually show an ozone problem is a fraction of what it was twenty years ago.

A large part of the improvement is due to cleaner cars. A car today is literally 20 times cleaner than a car produced in the sixties. Soot emissions from diesel trucks have dropped 85 percent since 1975. Future restrictions already in place guarantee significant further reductions in new cars over the next ten years. It is estimated there will be another 90 percent reduction in motor vehicle emissions over the next 20 years. Furthermore, as old cars are taken off the road, the effect multiples. (Similar positive statistics could be cited for water pollution, but that is for another day).

If our environment is getting so much better, why do people think it is getting worse? Partly, this is because groups that rely on creating an environmental crisis atmosphere for fundraising fan the flames. They may send out information on total amounts of pollution without comparing it to prior years.

Ozone levels go up and down with the weather. If the United States has an unusually warm summer, ozone levels can go up and press releases go out. The press doesn't comment on the good years.

Exaggerated concerns are not without cost. In addition to our higher labor costs, foreign countries frequently have little or no environmental protection. If people in general think our air quality is getting worse they can demand stiffer air quality standards, which at a minimum, increase consumer and utility costs and worse, push industry out of this state and country. If they're pushed out of this country the environmentalists actually increase world pollution as the products are produced in dirty production facilities in China or other third world countries.

Please let me know what you think on this issue. Contact me here in Madison--please call 1-888-534-0058 or in any of the following ways:

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