Congress threatens Wisconsin’s air, water

Over the past year, with the public’s attention focused on the economy, anti-environmental extremists in Congress have quietly launched an all-out attack on the laws that protect Wisconsin’s waters, from Lake Mendota to Lake Superior—as well as the air we breathe and the places we love.

It’s the most radical, reckless attack on our environment in our lifetimes—and it’s happening under the radar, through provisions slipped into massive budget bills.

191 anti-environment votes

According to a study conducted by Rep. Henry Waxman (Calif.), the U.S. House cast an incredible 191 roll call votes in 2011 on measures that would block the EPA from keeping our waters clean, making our air safer to breathe, or enforcing other environmental protections.

In February, the House rammed through a budget bill that took aim at our rivers and streams, our air, and funding for national parks. In July, the House voted to gut the Clean Water Act by stripping the EPA of much of its oversight authority. In August, the U.S. House passed a bill containing 39 separate environmental attacks.

The voting record of Wisconsin’s representatives has been mixed. Rep. Tammy Baldwin has been our most consistent environmental supporter. Rep. Sean Duffy has cast 33 votes against the environment—more than any other member of our congressional delegation and their aides in both Wisconsin and Washington, D.C. Thousands of our members have called, emailed or petitioned their lawmakers.

So far, none of these attacks have become law, with Wisconsin Environment research, advocacy and grassroots action helping to hold the line.

In 2011, we released five research reports, including one entitled “Wisconsin’s Biggest Mercury Polluters,” that helped spotlight the consequences of lowering our guard against pollution. We’ve personally made our case to members of our congressional delegation and their aides in both Wisconsin and Washington, D.C. Thousands of our members have called, emailed or petitioned their lawmakers.

With the Senate rejecting four of the worst proposals this fall, the tide might be starting to turn. We’ll keep you informed, so you can let your lawmakers know where you stand. To sign up for alerts, visit our new website at www.WisconsinEnvironment.org.

Find out how your representative in Congress is voting on the environment.


Lake Petenwell. Among the 191 anti-environment measures voted on in the House were ones that would allow more pollution of Wisconsin’s lakes.
Recently, the Obama administration announced a plan to require cars and trucks to meet a 54.5 miles per gallon fuel efficiency standard by 2025. In November, the administration opened a public comment period on the proposed standards.

The standards mark the biggest step America has ever taken to fight global warming—and benefits would be felt close to home. By reducing oil consumption, the proposed standards would generate annual savings of $571 million—or $239 per family—in Wisconsin alone.

Unfortunately, with the National Auto Dealers Association lobbying to weaken the new standards, and some of their allies in Congress vowing to block it altogether, this victory is not yet a done deal. Our staff and members are urging the Obama administration to seize this important opportunity to get America off oil and stop global warming.

Support strong for local farms

Fresh organic produce from local Wisconsin farms tastes better knowing that when we buy local, we’re supporting farms that are gentle on our environment.

That’s why when the U.S. House voted to cut the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” program, a key initiative to help small, sustainable farms, we made sure to let our senators know that local farmers need their support.

Wisconsin’s small farms face an uphill battle against powerful agribusiness. Programs like “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” make it easier to sell fresh produce at schools, at farmers markets, and to low-income families. Thousands of people joined our call and we’re part of a national effort to involve farmers and local food advocates in defending the program.
Wisconsin has laid the foundation to become a major player in the solar energy industry.

“Solar energy makes sense in Wisconsin,” said Wisconsin Environment’s Scott Thompson. “It’s incredibly popular with Wisconsinites, and as prices continue to drop and technology continues to improve, we need to make sure we embrace this environment-preserving and job-creating industry.”

Proven track record
Wisconsin has ranked as high as fifth in the country for the size of our solar workforce, and solar start up companies continue to develop in industrial centers like the Menomonee Valley in Milwaukee.

Along with California and Texas, Wisconsin is one of three states to be home to two “Solar America Cities,” Milwaukee and Madison. These forward-thinking cities have been recognized by the U.S. Department of Energy for using innovative approaches to remove market barriers to solar and encourage adoption of solar energy technologies at the local level.

Prices are dropping
So, what’s new about solar?

The big news is the price, which is dropping rapidly. Analysts predict that, as early as 2016, solar will achieve grid parity with natural gas.

Yet just as solar is ready to come into its own as an environmentally superior, highly competitive source of energy, some politicians want to pull the plug.

“That’s crazy,” said Thompson. “Wisconsin should be catching up with states that are racing to the top on solar, not falling further behind.”

Progress to be made
Wisconsin Environment is working with stakeholders in the solar energy industry to implement sound policy to bring clean and renewable solar power to more homes and businesses across the state. Specifically, we are calling for:

- **Power purchasing agreements.**
  Regulatory uncertainty keeps businesses from leasing their land (or roofs) to companies to install solar panels and then selling the heat or energy produced back to the property owner. A local solar company executive says that removing this market barrier could double the size of business in one year.

- **Net-energy billing reform.**
  If your solar installation produces more energy than you use, you can sell it back to your utility company. Unfortunately, recent decisions have cut the rate those utilities pay for your energy. By raising the rate, we can provide more incentives for individuals and businesses to put solar panels on their roofs.

- **Solar resource standard.**
  By requiring our utilities to generate 10 percent of all of our energy from solar power, we can transform our potential into concrete steps to break our fossil fuel addiction and tackle the climate crisis.

The EPA has recently worked on several clean air standards including the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule. Can you explain what these standards mean for the average American family?

These new Clean Air Act standards mean cleaner, healthier air for American families.

The Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule are part of a series of commonsense steps under the Clean Air Act to reduce emissions of mercury, acid gas, particulate matter, arsenic and other harmful chemicals from some of the biggest polluters in the nation.

These reasonable steps will provide dramatic protections to our children and loved ones.

What’s the best way for our supporters to express their opinions?

Unfortunately, we are at a point where we have to remind some leaders in Washington to put the health of their constituents above the wish lists of special interests. Speaking directly to those who want to undermine commonsense environmental protections is one of the best ways to stand up for your right to clean air and clean water.

For the full interview, visit www.WisconsinEnvironment.org/page/WIE/lisa-jackson-interview
In December, the Environmental Protection Agency moved ahead with efforts to significantly reduce mercury, soot and smog pollution from power plants. We expect these standards will save more than 40,000 lives every year. We built support across Wisconsin to ensure these rules were adopted:

- We released two reports last fall on the health impacts of smog and mercury pollution. The reports also reveal how much pollution is emitted by specific power plants in Wisconsin and nationwide.
- We partnered with our national coalition to help motivate more than 800,000 people across America to send the EPA public comments in support of strong action on mercury—no other single EPA rule has ever received so much public support.
- We held an event with state Sen. Chris Larson at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Zilber School of Public Health to call attention to the dangerous health impacts of smog pollution from coal plants.