

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin Mayors Play a Key Role in Freshwater Summit in Ottawa

As part of its $1 Billion Booster for Freshwater Health campaign, the Cities Initiative actively participated in an event that showcased the binational importance of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin.

A delegation of Cities Initiative members, including **Mayor Gino Moretti (Saint-Anicet, QC; Vice-Chair of the Cities Initiative), Mayor Maja Vodanovic (Lachine, QC; Member of the Executive Committee of Montréal, QC; and Board Member, Cities Initiative), Mayor Andrea Matrosovs (The Blue Mountains, ON) and Reeve Bert Liverance (The Archipelago, ON)**, joined Cities Initiative staff in Ottawa as part of the Summit on Fresh Water hosted by the Canada – United States Inter-Parliamentary Group (CEUS). The summit brought together diverse voices to highlight the basin's importance to Canada's economy and quality of life. The Cities Initiative played an active role in preparations for the event.

The summit offered an opportunity for Cities Initiative members to participate actively and remind the Government of Canada of the importance of investing in freshwater programs and launch a Canada Water Agency to improve coordination and management of this key resource.

The event began with introductions by CEUS members, **Hon. John McKay (MP. Scarborough)** and **Vance Badawey (MP, Niagara Centre; Co-Chair, Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Group of CEUS)**. The **Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Hon. Steven Guilbeault (MP, Laurier–Sainte-Marie)** followed with welcome remarks where he reiterated the commitment of the government to launch an independent Canada Water Agency and strengthen its Freshwater Action Plan. Participants also heard from MPs **Philip Lawrence (Northumberland–Peterborough South)** and **Brian Masse (Windsor West)**, as well as Representatives **Marcy Kaptur (Ohio)**, **Jack Bergman (Michigan)** and **Mike Gallagher** (**Wisconsin)**.

Mayors Vodanovic and **Matrosovs** participated in a panel on the importance of the basin for Canada and Canadians moderated by **Hon. Judy Sgro (MP, Humber River—Black Creek)**. The mayors shared municipal perspectives on the high cost of inaction when it comes to protecting the region's water quality. They were joined by Manon Boisclair of AquaAction (a water innovation incubator) and Mark Ryckman of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters who shared the economic dimensions that make the case for protecting the basin.

A standout presentation was delivered by **Cameron Davis, the former Great Lakes "czar" during the Obama-Biden Administration**, a key partner with the Cities Initiative in the development of the Summit. Cameron detailed how the highly-successful U.S. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative came to be and provided advice to audience members on how to build support for a similar initiative for Canada.

As an introduction to a session on Action Plan 2020-2030, a project that was supported by the Cities Initiative as a member of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Collaborative, **Mayor Moretti** called for greater cross-border collaboration to address the many threats to our freshwater resources that know no borders.

Reeve Liverance had the opportunity to participate in a press conference (view here) with MP Badawey and Cameron Davis to highlight the Summit and the need for the Government of Canada to follow through on its commitment to make a historic investment in freshwater.

Other speakers included **Terry Duguid (MP, Winnipeg South), Parliament Secretary to Minister Guilbeault**, Canadian Commissioners of the International Joint Commission (Henry Lickers and Merrell-Ann Phare), Senator Jane Cordy (Nova Scotia and Vice-Chair, Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Group of CEUS), MP, Francis Scarpaleggia (MP, Lac-Saint-Louis and Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development).

Following the summit, Cities Initiative members headed to the House of Commons where they had the opportunity to watch Question Period, then head into the government lobby to meet with MPs and directly advocate for greater support for freshwater programs and the importance for municipalities of maintaining water quality to ensure they can continue to deliver safe, clean and affordable water.