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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
December 5, 1983

Mr. Paul E. Healy
City Clerk
City Hall
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Dear Mr. Healy:

Thank you for sending me a copy of your Resolution regarding acid rain. I share your view that acid rain poses serious environmental hazards. Passing legislation to control this problem must be one of the top priorities of the 98th Congress.

Six years ago, when I was a member of the House Interior Committee, I chaired a hearing on the environmental impacts of coal. The testimony I received raised serious concerns about the potential impact of acid rain. Since that time, scientific evidence has been confirming the damage from acid rain and identifying the causes. In 1980, as a member of the Senate Energy Committee, I chaired hearings devoted entirely to the subject of acid rain. The testimony convinced me that this serious environmental threat is growing and steps need to be taken soon to avoid irreversible environmental harm.

During that same year, I offered the "Acid Rain Amendment" to legislation that would provide subsidies to utilities that converted from oil to coal. My amendment would have prohibited such subsidies if the conversion resulted in greater emissions of sulfur dioxide, a primary cause of acid rain. Even this modest amendment to prevent an increase in acid rain was defeated by the Senate, demonstrating that there was insufficient political support to address the acid rain problem.

In the last three years scientific evidence has mounted and political support has grown. Current Senate efforts are directed at amending the Clean Air Act. I am an original cosponsor and strong supporter of Senator Mitchell's Acid Rain Control Act, S. 145, which would require an 8 million ton reduction in sulfur dioxide emissions. This bill is pending before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which hopefully will take up amendments to the Clean Air Act next year.

A hopeful sign in the Congressional debate over acid rain is that opponents of acid rain controls are now talking about a national utility surcharge to help pay for acid rain control measures. This demonstrates that the debate is shifting from questions of whether acid rain is a problem to questions of how do we address it. The issue of a surcharge is an important one for New England

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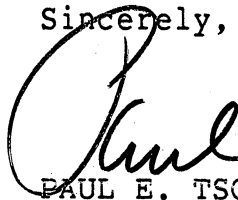
to deal with. Any system of surcharges should reflect the fact that we already have relatively clean burning power plants and our electric rates are among the highest in the country. But it may turn out that paying a surcharge is the political price we must pay to pass acid rain control legislation which would clean up the dirty plants in the Midwest. Such a surcharge should be in the form of an emission tax in order to be equitable.

In summary, I believe that the scientific evidence is clear: acid rain is damaging the environment in the Northeast and reducing sulfur dioxide emissions will help to reduce acid rain. Additional study and research is called for but should be pursued while we take steps to reduce acid rain. Additional study must not be an excuse for inaction. Acid rain, along with hazardous waste, is among the most serious environmental problems we face today. It is critical that we take steps to address it as soon as possible. More study will only confirm that we should have taken action earlier.

I have enclosed a copy of an editorial I recently wrote for The Springfield Union Sunday Republican as part of the "Massachusetts Acid Rain Awareness Week". I hope that you will find the article of interest.

Thank you once again for your concern about this vital issue.

Sincerely,



PAUL E. TSONGAS
United States Senator

PET/tcu
Enclosure

Acid rain problem 'outrageous'

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article by Sen. Paul E. Tsongas, D-Mass., was written in connection with Acid Rain Awareness Week, which concluded Saturday.

By SEN. PAUL E. TSONGAS

There is no longer any question that acid rain is a serious menace to the northeastern United States, including Massachusetts. The only question is what to do about it.

A growing body of scientific evidence documents the urgency of the problem. Acid rain is steadily poisoning Massachusetts forests and waters, with disturbing implications for our state's economy and public health.

Among the findings of Massachusetts researchers are these:

(1) More than 80 percent of the state's lakes and streams already contain alarmingly high levels of acidic pollution; (2) Acid rain has cut into the productivity of the state's forests; (3) There are possible links between acid rain and respiratory disease, cancer and other illnesses.

Though Massachusetts (as well as other northeastern states and Canada) suffers the effects of acid rain, it originates far beyond our borders in the Midwest.

Two blue-ribbon studies released in recent weeks have concluded that acid rain is caused primarily by sulfur dioxide emissions from Midwestern smokestacks, particularly those

Commentary

of coal-burning power plants. The studies are by the National Academy of Sciences and a White House panel appointed by George Keyworth II, President Reagan's chief science advisor.

Despite these studies, neither the Reagan administration nor the coal and utility industry has indicated a willingness to do anything to curb acid rain. The administration's acid rain policy has shifted only marginally from its head-in-the-sand posture to a noncommittal stance.

The industry has generally been chilly at best toward proposals to tighten regulations on sulfur dioxide emissions. The reaction is unfortunate and self-defeating.

If the industry is to have a voice in the solution to acid rain, it must first acknowledge that it is part of the problem.

One thing is crystal clear. The hazards of acid rain are so manifest — and the cause so authoritatively identified — that Congress will move on the issue. Industry can best represent its true interests by working with Congress on a remedy.

Is a remedy possible?

One hopeful factor is the linear relationship between sulfur dioxide emissions in the Midwest and the amount of acid rain that falls in the Northeast — a relationship described in the report of the National Academy of Sciences.

That is, if the Midwest cuts its sulfur dioxide pollution by 50 percent, the effect will be a 50 percent reduction in the acid rain that reaches our region of the country. The point is significant, for it means that more strin-

gent environmental controls on Midwestern smokestacks could curtail our acid rain dramatically.

Various kinds of coal scrubbers and other sophisticated technologies do exist for reducing sulfur dioxide emissions from power plants. Admittedly, the cost is not insubstantial.

But neither is the cost of acid rain. It contaminates drinking water supplies, blights timberlands, depletes agricultural soils of essential nutrients and impairs public health. The New England River Basins Commission puts acid-rain damage in New England and the Adirondacks area of New York at \$250 million to \$300 million a year, excluding the harm to public health.

In tackling the threat from acid rain, Congress will face a number of questions relating to the size of the reduction, the timetable and the allocation of the costs of the cleanup.

The highest priority should be a bill that mandates at least a 10-million-ton cutback in sulfur dioxide emissions by 1990. If agreement to share the costs of cleanup among the states (so that the burden does not fall disproportionately on the economically depressed Midwest) is the political price we must pay for legislation, then I would fight for a cost-sharing formula reflecting two facts: that the New England contribution to sulfur dioxide pollution is only 3 percent of the national total and that our electricity rates are already the highest in the country.

Acid rain is taking a heavy toll on our state and our region. With each passing day the injury is greater. This assault on our economy, health and environment is an outrage that we must stop now.



TSONGAS

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S-679

Comm. from Senator Paul Tsongas in appreciation of resolutions adopted by the Council on acid rain & regarding Senate efforts to amend the Clean Air Act.

In City Council,

December 12, 1983

12/12/83

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