



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

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Designated Federal Officer
U.S. EPA
State and Local Relations
(202) 564-3115

January 15, 2009

OFFICE OF CONGRESSIONAL
AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The Honorable Stephen L. Johnson
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Johnson:

As you prepare to leave the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), we want to express our appreciation and thanks for recognizing that local governments are true partners with EPA in protecting our natural resources and environment.

The challenges that you and your predecessors have faced leading the EPA are tremendous and those that follow will face a continuing array of challenges. The clean-up and protection of our environment is basic to everything the nation achieves. If the health of current and future generations is not sustained and the quality of life maintained or improved, every other aspect of our national life will suffer.

While EPA sets the policies for environmental protection, those policies are ultimately implemented at the local level. Cabinet level leaders cannot personally understand how each policy in the agency impacts local governments. However, the Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) EPA has created provides a mechanism to hear directly from local government officials so that you develop a more thorough understanding of how policies impact different communities.

You have demonstrated an understanding of this diversity and have sought counsel from the group you appointed. By appointing Randy Kelly as Deputy Associate Administrator for State and Local Government Relations you recognized the value of his background as both a state legislator and chief executive of a large local government and the importance of a partnership between EPA partnership and local government to achieve shared goals.

Debate in Congress and within the Administration is vital to establishing national environmental policies, but actual solutions are implemented at the local level. In cities and counties all across the nation, the siting and construction of water and wastewater treatment plants, solid waste facilities, the repair of aging and failing pipes, the construction of transportation facilities to reduce congestion and improve air quality, the establishment of programs to collect and recycle society's waste, the adoption of codes and land use plans that promote "green" development, and many other things that effect the daily quality of life of our nation take place with local leadership. Individually, no one project changes the nation's environment. Through sound national policy in which participants have a shared vision and commitment, the environment is changed and our health and quality of life improves.

While we have made great progress, much remains to be done. At the beginning of the nation's environmental effort open burning garbage dumps dotted the landscape, our rivers were contaminated with raw sewerage and chemicals to the extent that they could and did catch fire; deadly chemicals from industrialized pits leached into our land and waters; and little attention was paid to the impact of agricultural chemicals and pesticides in our rural areas. Both the quality of life and health of our citizens was degraded and endangered. America awakened and saw the problem, and with the same national commitment that put a man on the moon, Congress and the Executive Branch moved to address the issues by developing national policies with standards.

Beginning in the 1970s, laws were passed, EPA was created, and billions of dollars in the form of grants were made available to states and locales to begin meeting the national standards that had been imposed. It was a monumental effort, but the environmental health of our nation began to recover. Laws, policies and regulations were adopted, but EPA also included implementation and funding strategies such as federal grants and loans to assisted local governments in meeting these new requirements. This was a key to the monumental environmental clean-up that took place.

We have come a long way in making our environment safer, but serious new and often insidious challenges continue to develop. Most of the early challenges were of our own making and confined to our nation where U.S. policy could address them. The same is not true today. Many nations have few if any controls over the degradation of their own environment and often that of other nations. Much of the problem is coming from increasing energy demands and the search for energy resources. EPA clearly has a role to play in helping find solutions to these world wide problems, but the domestic situation also requires continuing attention.

While mundane when compared to such global issues, local environmental concerns remain challenging. A growing population and an aging infrastructure particularly in our older population centers pose huge challenges to local governments and the nation's

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economic future. EPA's 2002 estimate of the cost of upgrading our current water and wastewater infrastructure over the next several years is nearly \$3 billion. It is surely much larger today given the increase in cost of all construction materials.

To meet this challenge, we must continue to enhance the partnerships between EPA and the regulated communities. During this administration, an unprecedented dialog has taken place between the EPA Administration and local governments represented by the LGAC. Further, since LGAC members are involved in their national organizations, the connection is even stronger with a national constituency. As we move forward in a period of financial uncertainty and disruption of financial markets, it is going to be most important that the model for collaboration and partnership established during your administration be continued.

The entire LGAC Membership wishes you the very best as you move on the next phase of your life.

Sincerely,



Jerry Griffin
Steering Committee



Roy Prescott
Chair