

Keynote Statement by Senator Tom Carper  
Spring Meeting – Environmental Council of the States (ECOS)  
March 17, 2021  
[by Zoom]

Thank you, Ben, for that gracious introduction.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you and so many of your colleagues for sharing with me and my staff your views on the often challenging relationship between the States and EPA as co-regulators and co-defenders of our environment and quality of life.

As a recovering Governor, I take the role of states in environmental protection—and each of your roles as leaders in your states—very seriously. To put it bluntly, where would we be without you?

That is why we have a great opportunity and responsibility—with a new Administration in place—to take a step back and ponder the critical role we all play in defining the fates and futures, not only of our states and communities, but of our globe and all those who need our help the most.

Perhaps it is best for us to think, not as dictators of that future, but as guides to a world that offers a healthy, viable, enriching place for us, our children and their children—and all the creatures who share this planet with us.

And that brings me to a couple of issues of great interest to many—if not all—of you: water and climate.

One of the wisest nominees we considered over the past four years on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, which I now have the very good fortune to chair, was a fellow named Rob Wallace. He was nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. When I met him to size him up as a candidate for that critical role, he slipped in a pearl of wisdom that struck a deep chord within me. As we explored a roadmap for productive work together in a very divisive political climate, he said, “You know, Senator, I truly believe bipartisan solutions are lasting solutions.”

I couldn’t have said it better. In fact, since that day, I have quoted him time and again as we—as Senators, you as environmental leaders, and our nation as a whole—struggle to push past useless rhetoric and posturing to find solutions that will serve us and all our descendants well.

Many of my colleagues and I embraced that ethic in pushing legislation to reduce hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) emissions by 85 percent over the next 15 years. My chief ally in that effort was a Republican Senator from Louisiana named John Kennedy. Our bill had 32 cosponsors – 16 Democrats and 16 Republicans. That legislation—which we included in our omnibus spending package at the end of last year—is now law. Passed by a Republican majority

Senate and signed by a Republican president, it will result in half a degree Celsius of avoided global warming by substantially reducing emissions of one of the most potent greenhouse gasses.

That is the sort of collaborative effort I would like to bring to the rest of our climate challenges. And I truly believe we can. There is so much at stake, and there is so much to gain—everywhere in our economy, throughout our nation, and across our planet.

Another wise man—Senator Ted Kennedy—shared another pearl of wisdom with me, as a fresh face when I first joined the Senate some 21 years ago. When I asked him why so many Republicans wanted to join him—one of the most liberal Senators—as cosponsors of his bills, he said: “Tom, it’s because I’m always willing to compromise on policy; never on principle.”

On climate, that principle is to achieve a net-zero carbon economy by 2050—at the latest.

Why? Because that’s what the science tells us we must do.

How? Well, that’s where the compromises are. Fortunately, we have so many broadly attractive options, and we’re going to need to use them all.

Among them are:

- Electric and hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles. That is going to happen. I’m sure you’ve seen General Motors commitment to produce only fossil-fuel-free vehicles by 2035. And my staff and I are working as I speak on surface transportation legislation that will ensure substantial investments in the fueling infrastructure needed to support that fleet of the near future.
- Innovative, cost-effective and reliable renewable sources of power.
- Carbon capture, utilization and storage capacity—including the direct capture of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere—a prospect we on the EPW Committee enhanced in our bipartisan legislation called the USE-IT Act, which was also enacted at the end of this past year.
- Advanced nuclear—technology that we on EPW are pushing the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to promote and enable as quickly as it can.
- Partnerships with farmers and foresters to incentivize and employ soil management techniques that will maximize the carbon sequestration potential of our agricultural sector. That will be a win for climate, soil health and healthy waters.

These are just a handful of the opportunities we face, and I know many of you—from red states, blue states, and all colors of other states—are front and center on any number of other efforts ranging from wind and solar deployment, to biofuels production, to regional carbon trading systems like the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative—or RGGI—for which I know you, Ben, are providing great leadership.

There is so much more to say—especially with this crowd, but I’ve decided not to give you my full 45-minute speech. I would, however, like to wrap with one final, critical issue that has truly hamstrung our efforts to ensure clean water.

That issue is the definition of waters of the United States – or more affectionately referred to as WOTUS. We have all witnessed the swing of the WOTUS pendulum back and forth from administration to administration. What we have not found is the lasting solution. One that will not only survive judicial scrutiny, but is also based on solid principles and enjoys bipartisan support.

A definition that is predictable, understandable, and supportable is one that will stand the test of time. That would be a solution that achieves the principles I believe we all share:

- that all our citizens—no matter their zip code—deserve access to clean, healthy waters;
- that all our fish and wildlife deserve water and wetlands in which they can thrive; and
- that our economy—from brewers, to farmers, to fishing guides—must have access to waters that keep businesses viable and competitive.

As EPW Chairman, I pledge to work with you, all stakeholders, and the Biden Administration to ensure we drive toward a solution built on those principles and reflecting the capacity we all share to find the best way to meet it.

I must confess, I really miss being a governor – and having opportunity to work directly with such a diversity of talented experts—just like the dedicated professionals in your agencies who work to advance the principles you all hold dear.

I will never forget that one last principle that lies at the heart of many of the laws we administer and oversee—the principle that we are all in this business together—federal, state and local—in a cooperative system of environment governance that has served us and our nation so well for half a century.

The magnitude of the challenges we face will call for the best from all of us, and I look forward to working with ALL of you to define a healthy, vibrant and sustainable future that embraces us all—including our communities of color, our Tribal nations, our most passionate environmental advocates, our business community, and all the creatures that share this planet with us.

My deepest thanks and appreciation to you all.