

JIM JEFFORDS



UNITED STATES SENATOR • VERMONT

**Statement of Senator Jim Jeffords
Press Conference
July 17, 2001**

Twenty years ago, Vermont Senator Bob Stafford sat in this very room as Chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee and said,

"The terms of occupants pass, fading into time. But an office and its obligations continue unabated."

These are wise words from a wise man. As I begin my tenure as the Chair of this great Committee, I heed them. Remembering that my service is finite, and the good of this Committee, the entire Senate, and the entire nation are much more important than any one individual.

I am the fourth Vermonter to have the privilege to hold the Chairmanship of this Committee. However, I will have the pleasure of being the first to be able to work in a tripartisan basis. I believe there is no Democratic or Republican, or Independent, way of protecting our natural resources and maintaining and enhancing our federal transportation needs. Only the right way, regardless of party label.

I have met with Senator Smith, and would like to publicly thank him for his patience and assistance during this time of transition. He and his staff have been helpful and cooperative, and I look forward to working with them.

I will work hard to continue the fine legacy of the great individuals who have served as Chairman but left the Senate, such as Senators Chafee, Moynihan, Stafford and others.

Now that my Chairmanship has become official, I thought it would be a good time to outline the agenda I plan to pursue for the Committee.

Our nation sits at an environmental cross-road. We can lead on clean air, or follow. We can lead on clean water, or follow. We can lead in reducing global warming, or follow. I say, let us lead.

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For three Congresses I have joined Senator Lieberman and others in introducing clean air legislation. Earlier this year we introduced a four pollutant bill called the Clean Power Act. This legislation requires reductions in sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, mercury and carbon dioxide. It will improve the public health of our nation and help protect our children's future, by putting in place a framework and incentives for cleaner electricity generation. I plan to move ahead with the legislation in the Committee, holding hearings in the coming weeks and months ahead, with a goal of moving a bill out of Committee by the year's end.

Building on the Clean Power Act, I would like to address climate issues in a broader sense, reducing greenhouse gas emissions to at least 1990 levels as called for in the Senate-ratified Rio Agreement. I am deeply disappointed in the Bush Administration's positions in the current round of negotiations on the Climate Treaty underway in Bonn right now. I urge the Bush Administration to commit to the Kyoto treaty, then work with Congress to show leadership and start to implement programs that will achieve its targets. Each year that passes without action to reduce global warming is an opportunity lost. This is crucial to future generations of Vermonters and all Americans.

I will also focus on improving the water infrastructure of our nation. We plan to write and consider legislation to help rebuild and meet drinking water and wastewater treatment needs.

As you know, the Senate passed brownfields legislation earlier this year to provide financial incentives and reduce liability for those who restore brownfield sites. Senator Smith did an outstanding job of moving that bill through the Senate. I look forward to working with the House to complete legislative action on this bill by the August recess, and see it signed into law this summer.

And of course transportation. I will work to marry our environmental goals with our transportation needs. As many of you know, by 2003 Congress must complete action on a transportation reauthorization legislation. This Committee will have an aggressive hearing schedule as we prepare for that great undertaking.

Finally, I plan to move as many nominations as possible in the weeks ahead. I have had the opportunity to meet with some of the nominees. These positions are ones of great importance to our nation, and I intend to work with the Administration and act judiciously and expeditiously in moving forward on these nominations.

Again I would like to thank Senator Smith, and all the members of the Committee for their support in this time of transition.