



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

LAWMAKERS TO FEDERAL OFFICIALS: LAKE LEVEL FORECASTS ALARMING

SENATOR PAM HELMING February 28, 2019

| ISSUE: **LAKE ONTARIO FLOODING**

Senator Pam Helming (R,C,I, Ref.-Canandiuaga) and Assemblyman Brian Manktelow (R,C,I, Ref.-Lyons) are imploring federal officials to act quickly to prevent a repeat of 2017, when area businesses, local municipalities, and residents sustained tens of millions of dollars in damage due to Lake Ontario flooding.

Helming and Manktelow, joined by several other regional representatives, penned a letter Feb. 22 to U.S. Senators Kristin Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer and U.S. Reps. John Katko, Joe Morelle, and Chris Collins, notifying them the water level must be stabilized or risk future flooding. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was also copied on the letter.

“This raises a number of extremely serious concerns,” Manktelow said. “The lake is already 14 inches higher than usual. The Army Corps of Engineers’ forecasting data shows that all of the Great Lakes’ water levels are significantly above long-term averages and are to remain so until at least July. There is the potential for devastation; the villages of Sodus Point and Fair Haven in my district would be underwater. This can be prevented; it would be beyond negligent if nothing was done.”

Senator Helming said: “The Lake Ontario flooding disaster of 2017 could have been prevented or mitigated if the IJC had taken a more responsible, sensible approach to controlling water levels and keeping local communities informed . We cannot let this happen again. That is why Assemblyman Manktelow and I are rallying local residents and leaders across New York State to seek federal intervention. The IJC needs to take immediate action to stabilize lake levels. We are requesting that resources be made available so that the State of New York and local communities can plan for the future. It is important that every level of government coordinate to prevent a situation like our region experienced in 2017.”

On Friday, Manktelow and a representative from Helming’s office met with Sodus Point Mayor David McDowell and Wayne County Emergency Management Director George Bastedo in Sodus Point to assess the situation. If the lake level reaches 246.5 feet, Wayne County could call for a state of emergency. The Assemblyman said the lake level is threatening to reach that point, so out of concern a copy of the letter will also be sent to International Joint Commission U.S. Sector Chairwoman Lana Pollack.

The IJC is a bi-national organization that regulates shared waterways in the United States and Canada. Two years ago, the organization initiated Plan 2014 to return the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario to more natural flows and restore wetlands and wildlife populations. Many have argued that the changed lake levels in the plan exacerbated heavy rains in 2017 and caused the flooding and other damage to the shores of Lake Ontario.

Jane Corwin, a former New York Assemblywoman who represented parts of Erie and Niagara Counties, was nominated in 2018 to be the U.S. Chair of the IJC. She questioned the method of study for Plan 2014 and said she would like it to be reviewed.

Senator Rich Funke (R,C,I-Fairport) said “The devastating flooding we experienced in 2017 demonstrates how important it is for the IJC to act in advance to prevent history from

repeating itself. With lake levels already elevated it would be governmental malpractice for the commission to simply cross its fingers and hope for the best. I am proud to join with my colleagues in government to demand that our Federal officials act aggressively to address the ominous forecast provided by the Army Corps of Engineers.”

Senator Robert Antonacci (R,C,I,-Onondaga) said: “I support Senator Helming and Assemblyman Manktelow in their efforts to address this important issue for Central New York residents. It is imperative that action is taken to prevent further economic hardship as well as to preserve the quality of life for these individuals.”

Senator Joe Robach (R,C,I-Greece) said: “I stand with those in our community who live along the lake and will continue to work with state and local officials as we look at any and all ways to deal with this ongoing high water situation. As we saw firsthand in 2017, this is not just a quality of life issue, it is a public safety issue that affected thousands of homeowners and residents of New York. I have, and will continue to raise awareness of this situation to the highest levels of state government.”

Senator Robert Ortt (R,C,I-North Tonawanda) said: “We must get out ahead of any impending flooding and do what is necessary to protect homes and businesses along Lake Ontario’s south shore. We have seen the damage and devastation that can occur when we neglect to take proactive measures. I implore the IJC to immediately consider what precautionary steps can be taken. We have ample time to solve this issue before it becomes an urgent hazard, and any failure to do so will fall squarely on the shoulders of the IJC.”

Assemblyman Will Barclay (R,C,I,Ref-Pulaski) said: “Some residents and businesses have not recovered from the last flood. We must do all we can regulatorily to ensure that water levels do not reach flood stage again this year. The time to act is now. I look forward to working with state and federal legislative colleagues to make sure we don’t have a repeat of 2017.”

Assemblyman Steve Hawley (R,C,I-Batavia) said: "The 2017 flooding along Lake Ontario's southern shore was nothing short of a disaster, but the silver lining is that we know what kind of situation can develop if water levels are not properly maintained moving forward. That is why it's crucial that the federal government step in immediately, before the spring rain starts, to stabilize water levels and prevent the calamitous situation we experienced two years ago. Furthermore, it is paramount that we and our federal representatives develop a recovery plan now, in case relief efforts are needed this summer to protect homeowners and businesses along the shoreline."

Assemblyman Mark Johns (R,C,I, Ref.-Webster) said: "We do not want to revisit the disaster from 2017. The IJC should start lowering the water level now to prevent those kinds of floods from happening."

Assemblyman Mike Norris (R,I,C,Ref-Lockport) said: "We saw firsthand the devastation the 2017 flooding along Lake Ontario's south shore had on residents, businesses and municipalities. The IJC needs to take swift and immediate action to prevent that kind of flooding from happening again."

Assemblyman Mark Walczyk (R,I,C,Ref-Watertown) said: "Nearly two years ago, the Front Yard of America communities along Lake Ontario and the St Lawrence River saw unprecedented damage from historic high water levels, which crippled businesses and turned the lives of property owners upside down. I'm proud to stand alongside my colleagues in the Assembly and Senate, as we call on federal officials to ensure that those who live and run a business along our state's waterways don't see a repeat of 2017."