

CONGRESSMAN SAXTON

It's a real pleasure to be here with you on this very important week in Washington, D.C., of course, National Oceans Week. Jean-Michel Cousteau is here and we recently renamed the National Estuary Reserve on the Mullica River as the Jacques Cousteau National NERR. So Jean-Michel, wherever you went to, thank you for being here.

It's a pleasure to join with everyone here in marking the beginning of Capitol Hill Oceans Week. As I said before, it's an extremely important week. This week provides an opportunity to highlight the many issues facing our oceans and our coastal areas and, in fact, as someone just pointed out to me, everything from Topeka, Kansas to the ocean. It's great to see the level of interest and the diversity of individuals and groups participating this week. I hope this is a great mark of things to come. Like our speaker, Jim Connaughton, I'm an avid sailor. In fact, just about 24 hours ago, I completed a three-year voyage, as we like to say as sailors, from Barnegat Bay into the Atlantic Ocean, along the New Jersey Coast, up the Delaware Bay, through the C&D Canal, and finally ending up in the Severn River last night. I awoke this morning to get a telephone call from my sailor friend who told me, "Your boat is still on the mooring in spite of the 45 mile an hour winds on the Severn River last night." So I'm thankful about that, and I have experienced firsthand both the beauties and the degradation of our coastal and ocean environment.

I remember well the years of 1987 and 1988 along the New Jersey coast. One of the themes of this week, I hope, will be to arouse the interest of the American people because in 1987 and 1988, the interest of the American people was aroused because if you remember, dolphins were washing up on our beaches. Medical waste was doing the same. There were red tides and green tides and all kinds of algae blooms, and beginning then, Republicans and Democrats from not only the coastal areas, but from all across the country came together and began to enact legislation which was a good start.

As a result, during the more than 20 years that I have been in Congress, we have made it a priority to promote the protection of the ocean environment as well as effective conservation measures and management of our living marine resources. From protecting the coastal wetlands to cleaning up our estuaries to promoting sustainable fisheries, to preventing ocean pollution which comes from on-land sources, all have been priorities during my tenure in Congress. We have accomplished a great deal, but as I said before, it is only a start. We have begun to highlight by enacting some of the few hundred recommendations contained in the U.S. Commission on the Ocean Policy Report, but much, as we all know, remains to be done. Someone was remarking before the session started, in 1982 we declared victory in saving Chesapeake Bay, and yet today, so much remains to be done. As a chief sponsor, therefore, in the House of the legislation to establish the U.S. Commission, I feel it is extremely important to follow through and ensure

the recommendations are effectively implemented. We need to build on the momentum generated last year by the release of both the U.S. and the few Ocean Policy Commission reports, and accomplish a true sea change in the way we utilize and manage our ocean resources. Given the scope and sheer number of recommendations from both Commissions, it is also clear that we need to prioritize our efforts because everything can't be done at once. First, it is important to authorize NOAA, or reauthorize NOAA, to give the agency the tools and mandates to truly be our lead U.S. Ocean Agency. Second, the Magnusson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is once again overdue for reauthorization. Important and wide-ranging changes were made to the act in 1996, but it is clear more can be and should be done to improve the management of our nation's fisheries. In addition, it is vital we start moving toward greater ecosystem-based management to protect the important habitats, ensure healthy fisheries, and preserve the integrity of our ocean and coastal environments.

As you will hear from our keynote speaker, the administration has begun implementing the U.S. Ocean Action Plan, their initial response to the U.S. Commission's recommendations. The Action Plan represents an important first step, but it is just that. In order for our Action Plan to become real, it will take significant amounts of budgetary authority which will only result from a clearer vision and the true cost of inaction or failure. It took ten years to implement the recommendations from the Stratton Commission, the first U.S. Commission on ocean policy. We all need to work together to ensure implementation does not take that long this time. We need to capitalize on the enthusiasm and momentum generated by the Commission's reports and their recommendations.

It is my hope that this week will help generate the continued momentum to promote legislation and build support to effectively implement the Commission's recommendations. The only way any of this will become a reality is with the continued active support of all sectors, and all of you in this room. Indeed, the only way major policy is ever enacted is with a groundswell of support from citizens who care deeply about an issue. Your presence here today is evidence of that kind of support and we thank you for it. I wish you well with the activities for the week, and look forward to your input on these important issues.