

Legislators Say Environmental Initiative Will Improve Air Quality for New Jerseyans Without Raising Taxes

TRENTON - Senator Bob Smith and Assemblyman John F. McKeon participated in a news conference today in the Statehouse Annex to educate voters on Ballot Question 2, an initiative appearing on the ballot this November which, if approved, would divert millions of dollars over ten years to air pollution control efforts in New Jersey.

"Currently, New Jerseyans are suffering from some of the worst air quality in the nation, and a major source for a lot of the air pollution plaguing our skies is from diesel engines," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee. "Ballot Question 2 gives voters the opportunity to clean up our air, and put our money where our mouths and lungs are, in terms of funding programs which will cut down on the amount of dangerous soot in our skies. The best part is that we can do this without raising taxes that are already burdening our State's homeowners and businesses."

"The key thing we want voters to understand is that a vote for Ballot Question 2 is not a vote for greater state spending which will hit them in the wallets and checkbooks," said Assemblyman McKeon, D-Essex, the Chair of the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee. "Right now, through the State's Corporate Business Tax, we are collecting enough revenue to realize our environmental goals, and are actually running with a surplus in some of the funds associated with cleaning up hazardous sites. If approved, Ballot Question 2 would re-prioritize our State's environmental plan, and would give us the resources to ensure clean air, clean land, and clean water for future generations of New Jerseyans."

The ballot question, the result of legislation sponsored by Senator Smith and Assemblyman McKeon which passed both legislative houses in June, asks voters to approve a constitutional amendment to reallocate the portion of the Corporate Business Tax dedicated to the State's environmental needs. Specifically, 17 percent of the 4 percent environmental allocation would be designated for the Diesel Risk Mitigation Fund, a program to retrofit diesel fleets in New Jersey with cleaner burning technology over the next ten years. Estimates put the total allocation at \$17 million each year, or \$170 million over the course of the 10-year lifespan of the Diesel Risk Mitigation Fund.

"These funds will put New Jersey at the forefront of cleaning up our air and reducing the risk of diesel particulate pollution in the State," said Senator Smith. "Statistics show that each year, New Jersey faces up to 800 deaths because of the health effects of diesel pollution, and there is a proven greater incidence of cancer and heart disease along high-traffic diesel truck corridors and in our State's urban centers, where there is a higher concentration of diesel pollution. We are literally being choked out of our homes, and unless we take the steps to reverse the damage, it's only going to get worse."

Assemblyman McKeon noted that many different interest groups have come out in favor of the proposed diesel retrofit program, including a coalition of urban mayors, a federation of environmental

groups like NJPIRG, the Sierra Club and the New Jersey Environmental Federation, and business-interest groups, like the New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA), which has been against many environmental reform efforts in the past.

"Not to espouse the usual green philosophy, but when you bring a group like the NJBIA in as equal partners, you know you have a very special environmental issue on your hands," said Assemblyman McKeon. "The fact of the matter is that air quality is something that affects everyone, and we've found a cost-neutral way of doing something about it without further punishing our residents and corporate residents with increased taxes. This truly is a win-win scenario for the State of New Jersey."

The legislators added that Election Day is November 8, and urged voters, regardless of partisan affiliation, to cast a vote for clean air for the future of the Garden State.

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