

For Release: Immediate
Monday, December 14, 2009

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SMITH: VIABILITY OF BARNEGAT BAY DESERVES LEGISLATIVE FOCUS IN NEW SESSION

Says State Has To Do More To Reduce Environmental Impact From Oyster Creek Power Plant, Other Pollution Sources

TRENTON – Senator Bob Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, and Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee, issued the following statement today regarding the Committee's more than two-hour-long hearing of his legislation requiring cooling towers to be installed at Oyster Creek Nuclear Power Plant to protect the Barnegat Bay from heated water discharges from the plant:

"Today, we heard from stakeholders on behalf of the environmental community, the energy community and the local community, in a productive hearing on the future environmental viability of the Barnegat Bay.

"All three sides seemed to agree that there's no one 'magic bullet' cure for the problems facing the bay, including fish-kills from heated water discharges at the Oyster Creek power plant and eutrophication and algae blooms which choke the life out of the waters in the bay.

"However, all three sides seemed to disagree about the best approach moving forward, with the locals and energy producers worried about the financial implications of imposing thermal pollution control standards on the aging nuclear power plant.

"In this economy, it would be irresponsible to move ahead with programs and restrictions which would cut jobs and diminish New Jersey's business competitiveness. However, I believe we can work with all parties to maintain jobs and improve environmental controls and Oyster Creek.

"Looking ahead, thermal pollution controls at Oyster Creek are only one small part of what needs to be a multi-pronged approach to reclaiming the Barnegat Bay and ensuring the environmental vitality of the ecosystem for future generations of New Jerseyans to enjoy.

"The problem isn't exclusively caused by super-heated water discharges at Oyster Creek. Nonpoint source pollution, caused by fertilizer run-off, development booms along the waterfront, and an increase in impermeable surface all contribute to the environmental decline of the bay.

"Unless we do something, the once-thriving ecosystem in the Barnegat Bay – and the fishing and ecotourism industries it supports – will collapse. This isn't a matter of if, but when.

"In the next legislative session beginning in January, I look forward to making the environmental sustainability of Barnegat Bay a key priority for the Senate Environment Committee. We owe it to ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren to reverse years of pollution and contamination which have driven the bay to the brink of collapse.

"I am confident we will be able to come up with solutions which will preserve the Bay and protect the fragile ecosystem

