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Gillibrand promises to tackle acid rain

By PETE KLEIN, Staff Reporter

BLUE MT. LAKE-United States Senator Kirsten Gillibrand made a short stop at the Adirondack Museum here for an environmental round-table discussion late Friday afternoon, Oct. 30.

Gillibrand met with Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal, Adirondack Mountain Club Executive Director Neil Woodworth and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Director of Federal Government Relations David Higby.

Museum Director Caroline Welsh introduced Gillibrand to local officials including Hamilton County Board of Supervisors Chairman William Farber and Indian Lake Supervisor Barry Hutchins as well as a number of museum staff and county residents before sitting down to talk about environmental issues.

Gillibrand briefly discussed her role on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and The Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, and her plans to promote clean air legislation in Congress.

New York's 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park has suffered some of the nation's worst damage from acid rain and is expected to suffer additional harm from a rapidly changing climate.

Adirondack Council Communications Director John Sheehan was the moderator.

ADIRONDACKS AFFECTED

Gillibrand said she recognizes the need for clean air legislation because, "The Adirondacks are overwhelming affected by acid rain and mercury."

Houseal agreed. He said, "This area has been hit very hard by acid rain. In Big Moose Lake, the water quality is worsening because mercury levels are affecting the fish."

Higby said his ancestors first moved to Big Moose after the Revolutionary War, and the need to solve the acid rain and mercury problems created by coal-burning power plants is the reason TNC strongly endorses the cap and trade bill.

MIDWEST POWER PLANTS

Woodworth said, "Two-thirds of the acid rain is due to 80 coal-burning power plants in the Midwest. Because acid rain has reduced the calcium in Adirondack soils, the trees are weakened and as a result we have lost almost 50 percent of the red spruce."

Woodworth added that two-thirds of the mercury poisoning of Adirondack lakes is also coming from the Midwest power plants, and anything that can be done to force the power plants to scrub out pollutants will help protect both the forest and the lakes.

Gillibrand agreed, saying, “The battle is with the Midwest states”

HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

When Gillibrand mentioned current legislative efforts to reduce carbon emissions by 20 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050, Woodworth replied, “We have the technology to remove 90 percent of the mercury by 2015.”

At the close of the short meeting, lasting only about 20 minutes, Gillibrand promised to work to include clean air legislation in the committees to which she belongs.

“These issues are very near and dear to me,” she said.

COOL PARK. HEALTHY PLANET

Just this past December Gillibrand became the first American to permanently retire carbon dioxide pollution allowances from a government-mandated carbon dioxide reduction program.

She did it through the “Cool Park. Healthy Planet.” program created by The Adirondack Council to prevent thousands of tons of carbon dioxide from being emitted by power plants from Maine to Delaware.

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is the first state government-mandated carbon dioxide control program in the United States. It requires power plant emissions reductions in New York and nine other Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic states.

CARBON ALLOWANCES SOLD

Each year, every power plant in the region must purchase one “carbon allowance” for each ton of carbon dioxide it emits. Each year, the number of allowances available at auction is reduced, until the emissions reduction goal is reached (10 percent in the region by 2019).

The Adirondack Council offers the public an opportunity to retire those allowances in groups of three tons each for \$25.

When making the purchase last fall, Gillibrand also purchased credits for each of her sons, saying, “It’s a very special Christmas gift for each of them.”