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*The Environmental Quality Bond Act of 1972
By Dr. Olga Berg
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THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION
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R.C.S.I. News Note

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by
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R.C.S.I. is one of the sponsors of the regional coalition to support the Environmental Quality Bond Act. In the past R.C.S.I. has documented the need for major investments in environmental cleanup in Monroe County. Currently, the money is needed to continue the Pure Waters program, to stop municipal and state heating plants from polluting the air, and to start an environmentally sound solid waste management program.

There are valid questions which can be raised in opposition to the Bond Act and we have considered a number of them before making a decision:

(1) Is this the time to ask the voters to increase state indebtedness? To R.C.S.I., completing the job of cleanup which we have started is of highest priority. If we wait prices will only escalate more than they have already, and the whole program will be jeopardized.

(2) Is the issuing of bonds the best way to raise the money and is State money needed at all? R.C.S.I. sponsorship was not requested until after the Bond Act was on the ballot, which was too late to consider alternate methods of raising money. State money is needed. Capital construction is expensive, far more than Monroe County can carry alone and there is no Federal construction or equipment money (except demonstration project money) for either solid waste disposal plants or air pollution control at this time. At the moment there is also very little Federal water pollution control money because the necessary legislation is stalled in joint committee. A new Federal Water Bill is expected to be ready before the year is out. If the final version comes out as R.C.S.I. hopes, and if it is fully funded, there will be generous Federal support for water pollution control, but we will not be eligible for full Federal funding unless the state pays its share.

(3) Is construction of capital facilities the best answer to environmental management? This is the most difficult question to answer; it must be answered differently for Monroe County and for the State. In Monroe County we are part way through a carefully thought-out regional construction program. It would be pointless to scrap a program on which we have already spent or are in the process of spending 282 million dollars just to start another program. Here, we need the money to finish a county-wide project that is well under way and that will result in clean water. Furthermore, the plants we put up are modular and can be modified for new technology.

In New York State as a whole the construction financed by the Bond Act will have an impact on the environment and people, but the Department of Environmental Conservation has not given us an environmental impact statement. Many environmentalists think that such a statement should have been ready before the Environmental Bond Act was put on the ballot. Specifically, New York State lacks a) an evaluation of alternate methods of waste disposal such as returning sewage effluent to land instead of water, or cleaning pollution at the sources instead of using centralized treatment plants; b) a reform of enforcement, which would finally apply the same controls to big polluters as to small ones - at present, for example, building construction is properly limited to the capacity of sewage treatment in small towns such as the town of Greece, but the Borough of Manhattan constructs enormous projects that flush directly into the Hudson; and c) a master plan for ecologically sound growth, since investments in public works do more harm than good if they promote overcrowding the land and degrading the water resources, as seems to be the case in Suffolk County. These are strong objections. In favor of the Bond Act, it can be said that it backs locally approved projects, many of which have been well thought out, and that defeating the Bond Act will only make the Department of Environmental Conservation less able to take hold of waste management on a statewide, long range basis.

(4) Are those areas most in need assured of getting money first?

No, they are not. In the state, municipalities must initiate requests for aid and must be willing to put up a certain percentage of the money. Those most in need, such as New York City, have reached their constitutional limit to borrowing and therefore can not supply their share of the money. In addition some communities are less willing than others to clean up. Monroe County has done the necessary to receive its share for clean up. We have the Pure Waters Plan which insures that the entire county will eventually be sewered. Even in this county, however, the lower Genesee is the body of water most in need of a cleanup, and both the City and the County are stalling on it.

(5) Will Monroe County get its fair share of the money?

R.C.S.I. hopes so. The Bond Act is written in two parts. The first is the Bond Act itself which is brief. The second is the implementing legislation where the construction projects eligible for aid are listed. The list shows the total amount of money (local, State and Federal) to be spent on each project; how much of this comes from the bond issue will depend on the amount provided by forthcoming Federal appropriations. In the implementing legislation 38.4 million dollars of construction is authorized for Monroe County water pollution control, divided as follows:

1. North West Quadrant Pure Water District Number 1 (Greece)	\$ 7,680,400
2. Town of Webster	9,198,900
3. Village of Brockport	1,627,000
4. City of Rochester, combined waste treatment, phase 1	19,982,300
	<u>\$ 38,488,600</u>

Fourteen billion dollars worth of construction is planned for the entire state, so roughly two percent of the total authorized construction is in Monroe County. Since we have about 4% of the total population that is less than our share. However, almost 10% of the construction authorized in the 1965 Bond Issue was in Monroe County, so that time we received more than twice our share.

In addition, specific uses for the 175 million dollars for construction and equipment for solid waste management have not been itemized in the implementing legislation. Monroe County is trying to introduce a long term plan for solid waste management (as recommended by the Rochester Engineering Society). Six companies have been asked to submit long term plans. The plans presumably involve capital construction and the purchase of machinery. As long as these plans also include resource recovery, bond issue money will pay 50% of the construction costs. If all goes well we should be one of the first counties ready to use this money, and we may reasonably expect to qualify for and receive solid waste management money.

Similarly we have a number of heating plants in municipal and state buildings that are spewing pollutants into the air. There is money allocated in the implementing legislation for fixing the furnace at Rochester State Hospital, and unallocated money that should be useable for other furnaces such as those in old schools. Needless to say there is not enough money allocated to fix all the defective heating plants in the State.

(6) Can we be sure that the money will be used as specified?

No, we cannot. The allocation of monies into various categories is in the Bond Act itself, but the uses of the money within each category are listed in the implementing legislation, which also assured us that the money will be used exclusively for environmental needs and for new projects rather than to pay old debts. Unlike the Bond Act itself, the implementing legislation is subject to amendment and change by the legislature without voter approval. The implementing legislation was written after extensive talks with environmental groups (R.C.S.I. was not among them). It is not perfect, and the legislature may amend it for the worse, but as long as the public is greatly concerned, there is reason to expect that the implementing legislation will be left alone, or perhaps even changed for the better.

We have sponsored the Bond Act because it will help this area to continue the environmental cleanup that we have been recommending for 8 years.