



Press Release

EESI Pays Tribute to Late Co-Founder and Chair Emeritus Richard L. “Dick” Ottinger

February 16, 2026—The staff and board of the **Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI)** join together to mourn the passing of **EESI Co-Founder and Chair Emeritus Richard L. “Dick” Ottinger**, who died on February 16, 2026, at the age of 97. He inspired countless individuals with his work and created a lasting legacy in environmental policy.

“The country has lost a brilliant and dedicated public servant whose impact has extended far beyond his former role as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives,” said **EESI Board Chair Jared Blum**. “He was a visionary co-founder of EESI and a pillar of the environmental community who galvanized us all. His legacy will live on, through EESI and through all the many individuals who believe, like Dick, that a lifetime commitment to protecting the environment can indeed make a difference. My fellow board members and our staff join me in expressing our deepest condolences to his family.”

“It’s thanks to Dick and many of the people whom he inspired that we have made so much progress over the years,” said **EESI President Daniel Bresette**. “And to his credit, even when progress seemed far off or in retreat, Dick always insisted that we keep at it. He never gave up doing everything he could to advance climate solutions.”

“The world feels emptier and sadder without my dear friend,” said **former EESI Executive Director Carol Werner**. “Having worked closely with Dick for so many years, I can attest to his visionary and inspiring leadership and his undaunted and generous spirit in always bringing new people into the quest of forging a better, safer, and healthier world for us all. To the end, he was just as enthusiastic and determined to make a positive difference as the day we first met in 1987. Fighting climate change, pollution, and environmental degradation truly was his life’s work.”

Ottinger was one of the first environmentalists in Congress. In 1975, he saw a need to educate his fellow members of Congress about environmental issues and to advance innovative policy solutions that both parties could embrace. Alongside fellow Reps. John Heinz (R-Pa.), Gilbert Gude (R-Md.), John Seiberling (D-Ohio), and Morris Udall (D-Ariz.), **Ottinger was instrumental in founding the Environmental and Energy Study Conference**, a bipartisan and bicameral Congressional caucus that included a majority of senators and representatives. The Conference, through its capacity to provide trusted educational resources, played a role in the passage of legislation including amendments to the *Clean Air Act* and *Clean Water Act* in 1977. In 1984, to comply with new Congressional regulations on financing, the Study Conference became the **Environmental and Energy Study Institute, an independent, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) nonprofit.**

Ottinger was the first chair of EESI’s board of directors. In 1988, EESI’s board issued a policy declaration stating that **addressing climate change is a moral imperative** and that all of EESI’s work should be looked at through a climate lens. After passing the position of board chair to Jared Blum in 2010, Ottinger continued to serve as Chair Emeritus, guiding EESI as it advanced climate solutions that benefit our nation’s economy, security, environment, and health.

For more information, please contact Amaury Laporte at alaporte@eesi.org or (202) 662-1884.

"I am so intensely proud that the organization I co-founded and led is still going strong today," said Ottinger on the 40th **anniversary of EESI's first board meeting**. "Everyone who has contributed to EESI over these 40 years has made a positive impact on U.S. climate action. EESI was one of the earliest leaders in examining environmental and energy policies through a climate change lens. I am confident that EESI is positioned to continue to make our world more sustainable and meet the challenges of the climate crisis."

Ottinger served in Congress between 1965 and 1971 and 1975 and 1985 as a Democrat representing Westchester County, New York. He played a key role in developing landmark legislation such as the *Clean Air Act*, *Clean Water Act*, and *Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act*. **Ottinger was appointed to the House Energy and Commerce Committee and chaired the Energy Conservation and Power Subcommittee for his final four years in Congress.**

Ottinger was originally inspired to run for federal office because of the pollution in the Hudson River. "The Hudson River fishery was virtually extinct because of lack of attention to pollution in the river," Ottinger **told EESI in 2021**. "My Congressional district ran along the river, so it was an important issue from the suburbs to Yonkers. When I got to Congress, I wrote legislation to establish an interstate commission to address pollution in the Hudson, and in my first year, we got that legislation passed."

After retiring from Congress, Ottinger's keen interest in environmental policy and lawmaking led him to **found the Pace Energy and Climate Center in 1987 at Pace University** in White Plains, New York. **Ottinger was the Dean Emeritus and a professor at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law**, which is consistently ranked number one in the nation for environmental law. In 2013, the Elisabeth Haub School of Law dedicated an energy-efficient classroom building to Ottinger.

Ottinger never lost hope that the climate crisis could be overcome. "If you want to make a difference in the future of the world, there is nothing more significant you can do than to become an advocate for the environment," said Ottinger in 2024. He always emphasized his faith in the youth movement to advance climate solutions. "The task is daunting," he said, "But young people get it!" In that spirit, **EESI's internship program**, which helps advance EESI's mission by providing opportunities for the next generation of climate leaders, was named in honor of Ottinger in 2010.

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The Environmental and Energy Study Institute (www.eesi.org) is an independent nonprofit advancing science-based solutions for climate change, energy, and environmental challenges. Founded on a bipartisan basis by members of Congress, EESI has been informing policymakers about the benefits of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and environmental conservation since 1984. In 1988, EESI declared that all energy policy must be examined through a climate lens, which has since guided us toward our vision: a sustainable, resilient, and equitable world.

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