

THE PURE DRINKING WATER ACT

HON. HOWARD W. ROBISON

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. ROBISON of New York. Mr. Speaker, after extensive discussions with Leonard Dworsky, director of the Water Resources and Marine Sciences Center at Cornell University, in my congressional district, a bill entitled the "Pure Drinking Water Act" was drafted and last September, introduced as H.R. 19422 in the 91st Congress. The purpose of this legislation—as developed jointly by Dr. Dworsky and myself—was to improve both the quantity and the quality of the drinking water provided to this Nation's citizens. Its need was based, among other factors, on the result of a survey conducted by the Federal Bureau of Water Hygiene of some 1,000 drinking water systems throughout the country which indicated that, of the systems analyzed, 41 percent were delivering water of inferior or potentially dangerous quality and that, additionally, 79 percent of the systems had not been inspected by State or county authorities in the past year, and that, for 50 percent of the systems, the operators could not remember when, if ever, such an inspection had been made.

At the time of introducing H.R. 19422, I was careful to point out that no public crisis presently existed, and that there was no need for individual concern—as the study in question also forewarned against—but I attempted to make the point that, as a nation, we had become altogether too complacent about the quality of one thing we took for granted when we partook of the same several times every day: The drinking water that flows from the tap in our home, office, factory, or public place. To end that complacency, and to avoid the development of anything resembling a public health crisis, my bill provided, among other things, for the vesting in the Administrator of the new Environmental Protection Agency of authority to develop national drinking water standards, as well as new and badly needed authority to conduct and encourage research to improve methods and procedures of identifying, measuring, and removing potentially toxic materials heretofore present

HR 437

1093 (Logan)

in our drinking water, along with training programs for upgrading the capabilities of the personnel of State and local inspection agencies, the personnel of the actual operators of the water systems, and, finally, to improve the detection, purification, and delivery mechanisms of all water systems needing such assistance.

Subsequently, to my pleasure and encouragement, I was joined in this effort by my able and influential colleague, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. ROGERS) who introduced a substantially comparable bill in the last Congress. Neither such proposal reached the hearing stage, but I am extremely hopeful that either my now-modified proposal as introduced in this Congress—H.R. 437—or Mr. ROGERS' version thereof, will not only reach that stage but will also realize enactment into law this year, for I truly believe that action in this area of environmental concern is urgently needed.

Support therefor, along with a general discussion of the background of the problem in hand, is now indicated by the following copy of remarks as recently delivered by Eric F. Johnson, executive director of the American Water Works Association, before the Soap and Detergent Association in New York City, and the same is well worth the consideration of all my colleagues:

WATER—THE FORGOTTEN DETERGENT  
(By Eric F. Johnson)

Water, we, in the water utility field, like to point out, is a detergent. In fact, we are inclined to say, it is the best detergent, and one without which your products would not do very much. "Duz," one of your members once said, "does everything." "Duz," we pointed out, "does nothing without water." And that should qualify us to talk to you.

The idea that we are both in the detergent business, of course, immediately makes one wonder why we are so different. The difference is obvious. You market your detergents. We seem reluctantly to make our available for as close to nothing as possible. Our soft sell is so soft that almost no one has ever felt it. And the remarkable accomplishment of almost always providing all the water the public needs when and where it needs it, safe and palatable, goes unnoticed—is taken for granted.

Mention public water supply these days, and the public says, as it does for your detergents, too: "Oh, yes, pollution." But pollution, or its control, is not what we are talking about. We are talking about more than \$50 billion worth of facilities that collect, purify, and distribute water to 175,000,000 people in the United States through 30,000 different water systems. We are talking about the delivery of more than 26 billion gallons, almost 110,000,000 tons of a vital necessity every day to the homes, and commercial establishments, and industries that need it. And what seems incredible is that almost no one realizes that this biggest of all industries, in terms of product, even exists.

The major blame for this public unawareness of public water supply is ours. Historically, the industry has been its own worst enemy. It has preached reduction in use of its product, it has bragged about its low rates, it has resisted improvements in its quality of service. In good part, this unbusinesslike approach has stemmed from the fact that 75 percent or more of water utilities are politically controlled, and political control is normally concerned more with the

shortsighted view of keeping rates down than with offering improved service. But even a major portion of the privately or investor owned utilities are small and concerned more with doing what has to be done rather than providing maximum service. Nevertheless, this is the industry that has, with the cooperation of state and federal regulatory agencies, developed the best public water supply service in the world.

The part of the state regulatory agencies in this effort has been to provide surveillance and technical assistance that has been particularly important because of the multiplicity of small, ill-manned systems. The part of the federal agencies has been to set minimum standards and to provide assistance in research and training to the overall effort to supply safe water to the public.

And the team has done its work so well that it has now faded almost oblivion.

Not just the public, but its elected representatives are almost completely unaware of the public water supply industry. As recently as 1966 there was a unified water supply and water pollution control program in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Then, by Reorganization Plan No. 2 of the Johnson administration, the water pollution control program was transferred to the Department of the Interior, leaving behind a minuscule water supply operation in a \$50 billion HEW. Every year since the change, the water supply operation has had its budget reduced, until in FY 1971 the Administration had cut it back to \$2,344,000, compared by then with a billion dollar water pollution control operation. It was at this point that AWWA began to get deeply involved in the process of protest, partly because its partners in the team that had developed safe water service were being wiped out and partly because those who sought to restore their effectiveness chose to do so by misrepresenting the facts to suggest a crisis that did not and does not exist.

In the past year or two, AWWA has been devoting a major part of its public information efforts to point out the imbalance between federal attention to water for fish and water for people, not with the idea of de-emphasizing the water pollution control effort, but with the hope of giving the community water supply program the support it deserves.

In so saying, let us emphasize first that the water utility industry is not looking for the kind of money that is now being pumped into the water pollution control effort. It does not need nor want construction grants to build facilities. It believes that it can take care of itself in these matters through its revenues from rates. And it feels that the unasked for grants that have been made available to it by a confused Congress have done more to hinder than to help the cause of better water service.

Where the water utility industry is asking for help is in research and training. It is in these areas of preparation for future problems that an industry consisting principally of very small unit operations has difficulty in taking care of itself. Basic research is not the forte of the six-employee utility, nor is the development of the basic technology of the field. Neither is the kind of training that is and will continue to be necessary to bring and keep personnel up to the levels of skill required to handle the increasingly sophisticated technology. In these respects federal participation is required, both through direct research and training activities and through grants to public and private institutions that must be enlisted in the effort if it is to be successful.

At the present time, we feel, the industry is capable of taking care of the known problems of water supply safety, but because of

the hiatus in federal support over the past few years, the margin of safety has been significantly reduced. And we fear that in ten years, unless a program commensurate with the importance of the problem, is mounted, there will be a crisis in public water supply—a crisis that will call for a costly and inefficient crash program that will victimize the public both in health and in wealth.

The restoration of some kind of proper priority for water for people is now in the hands of the new Environmental Protection Agency, and AWWA expresses its concern to Administrator William Ruckelshaus even before he had been confirmed in his post, asking for a separate and identifiable unit in his organization which would deal with water for people and a budget for that organization big enough to do the job. In the first organization of EPA, the water supply program is indeed separate, if not equal. It has been established as a division under the water quality—that is, water pollution control—office, but at least it still does have identity and perhaps with some legislative support in the 92nd Congress it can achieve parity with pesticides, solid wastes, air pollution, radiological health, and even water pollution in EPA.

In the past month AWWA has met with Acting Commissioner David Dominick of EPA's Water Quality Office and with Dr. Edward David, Science Advisor to President Nixon in the effort to bring some awareness in the administration to its neglected \$50 billion asset. Association representatives have met with Congressman Paul Rogers of Florida who is introducing a bill that will beef up the federal funding of water supply research and training and give assistance to the states in their water supply surveillance efforts. So there is some hope that the situation will improve. But the water supply industry will not really gain its proper status until the public understands what it is, what it does, and what it can do. And this, we recognize is going to take the kind of public information approach that your end of the detergent business can mount, but that ours has been unable to, principally because municipal ownership and political control make the expenditure of funds for public information always difficult and often impossible.

The situation, then, is this:

Over the first 60 years of the century, the water utility industry, working with the cooperation of the state health departments and the US Public Health Service, developed the best public water supply service in the world.

In 1966, with the transfer of the water pollution control program from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to the Department of the Interior, most of the trained personnel and most of the money for research and training that had constituted the Public Health Service contribution to the water supply effort was diverted into water pollution control, leaving in HEW only a minimal water supply program that has been reduced year by year.

The decimation of the federal part of the water supply team was paralleled in the state health departments, and, for lack of research and training assistance, in the state universities as well.

Water utilities are still doing the job of providing safe water to the public, but, because the research and training necessary to keep the technology and the technologists up to date has been lacking, the margin of safety has been greatly reduced.

To restore the water supply effort to its proper level, the Environmental Health Administration of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, motivated by the Bureau of the Budget, tried to scare the public into the belief that a crisis exists through

a deceptive report on the current status of public water supplies.

Concerned that the scare technique could drive a frightened public into drinking from unsafe sources, AWWA tried to accomplish the same end through educating the legislators involved in providing the funds for the Bureau of Water Hygiene, the HEW agency that works with water utilities, and was able, no doubt with an assist from the fear instilled, to get a small addition to the Bureau's budget that reversed the trend.

Now the Environmental Protection Agency has a chance to give community water supply the status that it deserves in the total environmental effort and has, as a first step, maintained its separate identity, although it has kept it in a role subsidiary to water pollution control.

The funds proposed for water supply research and training, and for assistance to state surveillance efforts, in the bills to be reintroduced into the 92nd Congress by Congressman Robison of New York and Congressman Rogers of Florida promise to give to the water supply effort the kind of support required to establish its proper status, without burdening the industry with the problem of construction grants.

At the same time, AWWA is mounting an action program hoping to get water utilities involved in the burgeoning interest in the environmental effort to point out not only their accomplishments but the things that they can do, using present technology, to improve water service.

The basic element, though, is public understanding and in this, certainly, your industry can be helpful. And you can be, too. Join AWWA!