

Committee on Resources

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**Testimony by Representative Jim Davis
in Support of H.R. 3834, the Desalination
Energy Assistance Act of 2004
House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water and Power
September 9, 2004**

Mr. Chairman, first let me thank you and the Subcommittee for holding this hearing on the Desalination Energy Assistance Act. Although I am not a member of this Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you and put a statement in the record. I believe that this is a very serious issue which Congress can help our communities address.

I am especially pleased to testify before this Subcommittee, one with so many Members that have planned desalination facilities in your districts, many of whom are cosponsors of this bill. As you know, communities all over the country are struggling to meet the water demands of ever-growing populations. We are witnessing the continuing trend of population growth, despite the fact that water supplies have remained the same or even decreased over the last ten to fifteen years. Water conservation and the emergence of water recycling as a tool for meeting non-potable demands have stretched available supplies farther and farther. But in many cases, the savings resulting from conservation and recycling don't even begin to make up for water supply losses attributable to environmental restoration programs that have forced the dedication of huge amounts of available water to environmentally sensitive areas such as the Florida Everglades.

State and local governments are facing impossible price tags for maintaining the nation's water systems over the next 20 years. In my home state of Florida, the five Water Management Districts have developed twenty-year regional water supply plans, to meet regional needs. These plans are updated and reviewed often. Between now and 2024 municipal water and wastewater needs will total between \$500 billion.

While the State of Florida has many small desalting facilities, I am proud to share with you the example of the desalination facility in my area of Tampa Bay. We have proven to communities everywhere that local communities can work with state agencies to come up with alternative sources of drinking water. Finally, we have found a source of water that is drought proof, environmentally sound and will even enable us to reduce groundwater pumping. While this facility has had its share of obstacles, this legislation would facilitate the means for other communities to adapt the technology that Tampa Bay used and benefit from the lessons learned at that facility. Today, the Tampa Bay facility produces 25 million gallons a day with a capacity to produce 35 million gallons a day. As of April, 2004 the Tampa Bay Seawater Desalination Plant has delivered 4 billion gallons of water to consumers homes and businesses.

Needs are large and unprecedented, because waters are shared across local and state boundaries. The benefits of federal help will accrue to the entire nation. For these reasons, I introduced the 3834, the Desalination Energy Assistance Act. H.R. 3834 enjoys the support of a large, bipartisan group of Members from nine different states stretching from Hawaii to Massachusetts.

H.R. 3834 would encourage the development of environmentally sound and economically feasible desalination projects by providing energy assistance grants to qualified entities such as local water agencies and public utilities in the amount of 62 cents per thousand gallons for the initial ten years of a project's operation. The rationale for this approach is that while the cost of desalinating water has dropped dramatically over the last decade, the energy costs associated with desalination are still quite high. Most experts believe that these costs will continue to come down over time and that desalination will eventually be widespread. But waiting for this to occur is a luxury that, in my opinion, we cannot afford. A modest investment to jump-start the development of these projects today is the smart thing to do.

Over the last 10 years, the cost of desalination has been dramatically reduced due to innovative technology. As many of you know, significant advances in membrane and other technologies have dramatically reduced

the costs associated with both seawater and brackish water desalination. These cost reductions have provided us with a new opportunity to address a host of regional and national water management issues if we are prepared to make an investment in this exciting new field.

The goal of H.R. 3834 is to encourage innovation, while ensuring that one technology is not favored over another. Whether these projects and others like them get built in time to address the nation's mounting water supply crisis is largely dependent on whether the federal government makes a commitment to invest in this new infrastructure as it has previously done in regard to other important water related infrastructure including potable water treatment, irrigation, flood control, and wastewater treatment.

I urge the Committee to complete consideration of this bill and bring the Desalination Energy Assistance Act the House floor. This grant system would add another tool for states and local governments to use for providing affordable and drinkable water to their constituencies. Mr. Chairman, again, I thank you and the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to address you today and look forward to working with you on this and many other issues in the future.