

The Water Resources Research Act

Amendments of 2005

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Water and Power Subcommittee; Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives

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Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4588

A bill to reauthorize grants for and require applied water supply research regarding water resources research and technology institutes established under the Water Resources Research Act of 1984

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 4588.

My name is Einar Maisch and I am the Director of Strategic Affairs for the Placer County Water Agency, located in Auburn, California. Placer County ranks as one of the fastest growing counties in the nation in a state that is home to more than 36 million people – and growing. Currently the Agency provides water delivery and power generation to customers covering an area from the Sacramento Valley to Lake Tahoe.

I also testify here today as a member of the National Water Resources Association (NWRA) - a nonprofit federation of associations and individuals dedicated to the conservation, enhancement, and efficient management of our nation's most precious natural resource; water.

There are three primary points I wish to make as you move forward on this legislation:

1. Continued support . It is important that the Congress reauthorize funding for our state research and technology institutes. Valuable research has been done since the original authorization and it has been shared with state water managers and the general public. Water use stakeholders, local governments and State legislatures have all benefited from such research in water quality, planning, resource management and overall water policy development. An additional authorization maintains this important partnership between federal and state governments and the academic community.
2. Greater Focus. We know all too well in the West, water is far more than mere academics. It is a full blown crisis, where the lack of adequate supply impacts our present and our future. We cannot overstate the vital link between water supply and growing demand as we look to the future.

Crippled regional economies, public health and safety threats as well as dramatically impaired natural ecosystems will be the consequence of myopic leadership; ill-informed judgment; and poor choices.

Adequate water supplies are a constant and increasing concern, particularly considering the West's rapid population growth where 9 out of 10 of the fastest growing states are Reclamation States.

Yet while the State Institutes received funding to be used *"for the purpose of conducting research, investigations and experiments relating to water resources and to provide for the training of scientists through these activities"* it appears in reality that securing new water supply sources has received too little attention – as if our needs remained stagnant to the 88th Congress that passed this forward-thinking Act in 1964.

It is the reality of 2006 which commands us to applaud Section 2 of HR 4588 as it begins to more tightly define the scope of research. Applied and peer reviewed research targeting the creation of new supplies; an emphasis on real solutions to existing supply problems, and the soliciting of bright new thinkers – a new generation of research scientists into the water resource arena are all most welcome.

Management of existing water supplies remains a high priority. Technology has been a friend to the water community in this regard. And no one would argue that water quality must remain a vital interest. Yet the debate over the importance of water quality versus quantity misses the point. We are a nation that needs both to meet the needs of a growing population and a fragile environment. And where government and academia meet to confront this issue we must demand a solution to both. We are big enough and smart enough to get beyond an either/or debate. Quantity and quality along with wise stewardship of the resource must be our focus.

3. Accountability. Any program, whether funded by public or private dollars should seek to be transparent and accountable. A three-year detailed evaluation of each Institute conducted by the Secretary to determine the quality and relevance of its research and overall impact does justice to the taxpayer dollar funding the program. I believe this will help maintain the proper focus on tangible, quantifiable results.

We applaud the further emphasis on the dissemination of the research results that will come. The state institutes will have no shortage of allies who will be willing to help share their findings. The NWRA stands ready to partner in communicating valuable research results with as broad a range of stakeholders and interested citizens as possible.

Finally, reducing the administrative costs of the program from a limit of 15% to 5% percent insures limited tax dollars will be spent on needed research. Overhead costs are a fact of life but keeping scarce dollars targeted on applied research is again a demonstration of good stewardship.

Across the nation on issue after issue, Americans are looking for leadership and solutions. People have grown weary of talk and debate and reasons why things cannot get done. Greater focus and accountability in this area are positive steps toward finding a long-term solution to our water needs.

I urge you to support this legislation; I thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today and would certainly be happy to answer any questions you may have.