

Committee on Resources

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Statement of Robert Neufeld
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Before

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

on

H.R. 2828
The Water Supply Reliability and Environmental improvement Act

July 24, 2003

Introduction.

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Napolitano and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Robert Neufeld. Presently, I serve as Chair, Board of Directors, Cucamonga County Water District based in Rancho Cucamonga, California (San Bernadino County).

Cucamonga County Water District is a retail water agency, located in the western portion of San Bernardino County within the Santa Ana River watershed, and provides water and waste water services to more than 150,000 people. Our agency receives approximately 50% of its water supply from the Inland Empire Utilities Agency, a member agency of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD). Approximately 40% of our locally developed water supply comes from ground water and the remaining 10% comes from local mountain sources.

Our service area overlays the upper portion of one of the largest groundwater basins - the Chino Basin - in Southern California. This is an adjudicated basin under the direction of the Superior Court, State of California and governed by the Chino Basin Watermaster.

I represented Cucamonga County Water District on the Chino Basin Watermaster Board and served as Chair for two and a half years. Additionally, I currently serve as a public member of the Water Quality subcommittee for CALFED that addresses water quality issues in the context of the Bay-Delta program.

Today, the Subcommittee asked to testify on water quality challenges resulting from the existence of perchlorate within our greater region.

Perchlorate, VOCs and other Water Quality Challenges

Throughout the Santa Ana watershed, approximately 30 water wells are currently shut down or out of production due to contamination from perchlorate or other Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). Today, some 300 wells are at risk because of perchlorate.

In the Chino Basin, 39 of the 106 wells, according to the Chino Basin Watermaster, have detectable levels of perchlorate. More than one in three exceed the current State of California "action levels" for perchlorate.

Estimates for remediation, experienced by one of our neighboring water districts, are \$1 - \$3 million per well. Projected across the Santa Ana watershed, the costs to maintain existing well production could range from \$300 million to almost \$1 billion. Such an investment would not produce a single drop of new water. It would merely protect what's already in production.

Perchlorate and VOCs (such as those found in an underground plume traveling from the Chino Airport) are in our Basin and throughout our region as a result of various Defense Department activities dating back to the beginning of the second World War.

The ratepayers of our water agencies, throughout our region, are functionally being asked to underwrite the cost of cleanup in 2003 for actions, activities and programs conceived in the early 1940s and thereafter. This is wrong. This is unreasonable. This is unacceptable.

These water quality challenges impose restrictions limitations and outright reductions of available water to serve the citizens throughout our region.

Our agency, Inland Empire Utilities Agency, the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWAPA), MWD and many of our neighboring districts have developed a strategy to address these problems and challenges. First, with regard to water quality - identify and remediate water quality challenges. Second, with regard water supplied, develop plans, programs and projects to expand our local water supplies.

Perchlorate and DOD

New Opportunity To Address Chronic Water Quality Issue

On Friday, July 11, 2003, Cucamonga County Water District hosted a regional meeting with our California State Senator, Nell Soto, representatives of other local water agencies, and J.P. Woodley, Assistant Under Secretary of Defense, Environment (DOD) and other Federal officials to discuss perchlorate in our region - and most importantly, what could be done, working together, to clean up our contaminated waters. As a result, a Memorandum of Understanding was executed.

We have agreed to work with DOD to find cleanup solutions and, most significantly, DOD has agreed to work with us. Together, we will evaluate new technologies and new "on-the-ground" solutions. This is positive. It is a first step. We are optimistic that this process will enable us - over time - to reclaim lost water production, and arrest the spread of perchlorate in the watershed.

The agencies which signed the MOU are prepared to provide land, access to wells, water supplies, staff time and other resources to this new endeavor.

If DOD, EPA and other Federal and State agencies work with us to cleanup perchlorate, VOCs and other impaired waters, then investments in water quality assist our efforts to expand our water supplies.

These are positive developments. For our part, we pledge our cooperation, assistance and full participation.

Expanding Our Water Supplies

Drought-Proofing the Region

The Santa Ana Watershed is one of the fastest urbanizing watershed in the Nation. As a result, demand for water is increasing in our District, Basin and Watershed. Severe drought visited us in the past 24 months. Imported supplies to California from the Colorado River have been reduced by the Department of the Interior. Perchlorate threatens some 300 wells supplying drinking water to millions of people. And, the list goes on.

We do not expect to receive more water from the State Water Project, and may well get less than we thought we would.

We certainly will not get more water from the Colorado River, and may well get less.

We can, nevertheless, expand our local water supplies.

At the heart of our strategy - develop local supplies to "drought-proof" our water district, the Chino Basin and Santa Ana Watershed.

This can be accomplished through water recycling, groundwater storage in the Chino Basin and in Orange County and construction and operation of desalination plants, conservation and other similar projects.

How would this be accomplished?

Some of the initiatives include:

In April 2001, the Bureau of Reclamation completed work on a multi-year Feasibility Study (Southern California Comprehensive Water Recycling and Reuse Study). It concluded that 34 water recycling projects in Southern California could produce some 450,000af of new water by 2010. The Inland Empire projects are slated to produce the most new recycled water. The Department of the Interior has not submitted this report to Congress as required by Section 1606 (b) of Public Law 102-575 and notwithstanding repeated requests by the Resources Committee - and this Subcommittee.

Our agency has completed a feasibility study for another new water recycling project. We will produce, before the end of the decade, more than 5,000af new recycled supplies. Customers have been identified and support for this initiative is very high.

The Chino Basin Groundwater project, dedicated a few months ago and now under construction, will have the capacity to store 500,000af of water. Orange County Water District, also in our watershed, is

constructing a similar project to store an additional 500,000af. Together, these two projects will store 1 million acre feet of water in two groundwater basins.

Local projects are the backbone of our water quality challenges. Local projects are also the means building water supply capacity and drought-proofing our region.

The Calvert Bill

The Calvert bill proposes a new office be established at the Department of the Interior to develop local water recycling, desalination, conjunctive use, groundwater storage and conservation projects throughout the Nation. We support this new initiative because it would commit the Federal government to provide assistance to communities who are trying to bring new water supplies online using innovative technologies.

Mr. Chairman, you have asked that we - and all others - review your new proposal, evaluate it and report back to you after Labor Day. We will do that. We believe that this proposal is an excellent start.

Finally Mr. Chairman, we thank you, Ranking Member Napolitano and all the Subcommittee Members for your leadership.