

Senator Paul Simon's Keynote Speech to the National Source Water Protection Conference

I got involved in the water situation somewhat accidentally. I had written two books on the world food and population problem and sponsored legislation in this field, and I hate to say it, I hardly mentioned water. Then on the Senate Foreign Relations committee I started getting reports from the World Bank and others saying we're going to be facing a real crisis situation, and so I started to get involved.

I'm not a technician. You're the technical experts here. Perhaps I should be listening to you rather than you listening to me but I do know about what Bill (Diamond) said in his opening remarks about cooperation being essential to where we have to go. I also know that the quality problem and the quantity problem that we face in the world are tied in together. I want to give you just a little on the parameters of where we are in the world today and why what you're doing really is important.

Eight days ago, I returned from a trip to Malta to address the European Desalinization Society. (The Society) includes the Middle East and North Africa and Europe in their organization, and then I went to Israel to meet with leaders there and get a little better informed on what the situation is currently there in Israel. Incidentally, one of the things I did there was moderated a two-person panel, the Israeli Water Commissioner and the Palestinian Water Commissioner, and I think to the surprise of both Palestinians and Israelis in the audience, they really agreed on almost everything. Water can be a catalyst for war. Water also can be a catalyst for bringing people together, and obviously we want to see that the latter happens.

About a year and a half ago, the State Department asked me to go to Jordan and Syria to meet with leaders there and see if they would work on a regional approach to water because that has to happen eventually in that region. I would love to tell you I came back and everyone has agreed to work together over there. It's a little more difficult than that, but there is a recognition on the part of leaders in all the countries in that region that eventually they're going to have to work together. The problem is, will "eventually" happen quickly enough.

Egypt, for example, is ninety-eight percent dependent on the Nile for its water. Eighty-five percent of the Nile comes from Ethiopia. Ethiopia has one of the highest birth rates in the world. They're going to double their population in the next twenty years. Those two nations ultimately are on a collision course. We're fortunate in the United States, even though some of your states like Arizona have real problems, but we're four percent of the world's population, we have eight percent of the world's fresh water.

If I had a blackboard here in back of me, and I'm getting used to blackboards now that I'm teaching at a university, the population line would show that for most of the history of civilization we had about ten million people on the face of the earth. In 1830 we hit one billion, in 1930 two billion, today we have about six and a quarter billion, and depending on whose projection you believe, in the next fifty to ninety years we will go from six and a quarter billion up to about eleven billion, and then it will taper

off at that. While that line is going up dramatically, there's another line for water, and it's level, with no escalation. You don't need to be an Einstein to recognize we're on a collision course.

Periodically, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the other intelligence agencies give a report to the President where we're going to be in fifteen years. Their last report to President Clinton said "in fifteen years, the great resource shortage in the world will not be oil, but water, and there will be regional wars over water." That is where we're headed. That is not necessarily where we have to head, if we look ahead, if we look long-term, and those of you who are here have to help us in the United States take a long-term look, and have to help the rest of the world look long-term.

We tend, in the public sector, to look at the next election. In the private sector, we tend to look at the next quarterly report, the next stockholders' meeting. We need to be looking ten years from now, twenty years from now, thirty years from now.

This morning's Washington Post- full page article about oceans- yesterday's New York Times magazine- a story about Afghanistan- water comes up in it. Any story from Iraq, any in-depth story talks about water. Between the United States and Canada we have over one hundred disputes. We're not going to go to war with Canada over water, but in the Middle East it's uncertain what's going to happen. India and Pakistan- it becomes much less clear, and just the humanitarian side suggests that we ought to look in depth quickly.

The World Bank says fourteen thousand people a day die because of poor quality water, easily preventable deaths, ninety-five hundred of them children. Ninety-five hundred is six hundred and thirty times as many as were killed at Columbine High School. We were stunned at what happened at Columbine High School, as we should have been, but today, June 2nd, 2003, six hundred and thirty times that many young people are dying needlessly, and we hardly pay any attention to it.

Domestically, you have, as I understand, forty-nine states represented here. California knows the problems it faces. The Southwestern Metropolitan Water District represents sixteen million people. I've met with your leaders on several occasions. Texas is going to face real problems. Florida is starting to face the problems there. Tracy (Mehan), you represented the Great Lakes area. I remember, when Tom Ridge was the governor of Pennsylvania and headed the Great Lakes Governors' Association. He asked me to speak at a luncheon meeting of the Great Lakes governors, and I said to them, long-term, if we don't find the right answers, the pressure will come from the Southwest to pipe water from the Great Lakes to the Southwest. People will say we would never approve of that.

Let me tell you, if senators from Illinois and Michigan want legislation passed, they're going to have to get support from California senators, and Arizona senators, and people from the Southwest.

Even so, we are fortunate. China, for example, which is not listed as one of the nations with the most serious problems, has seven percent of the world's fresh water and twenty-two percent of the world's population.

The answers are short-term and long-term. Short-term, one of them is just hauling water. Cypress, for example, buys plastic bags of water from Norway, 5.6 million gallons to a bag. That's a temporary answer, it's an expensive answer. It makes much more sense for Cyprus to be buying from Turkey, right next door, but the political situation hasn't permitted that up until now and I'm pleased to say that the situation is improving a little and maybe that will change, but Cyprus is looking long-term at desalination.

Conservation - extremely important short-term and long-term, and conservation inevitably means you have to look at pricing. It's interesting, when there were two Germanies, East Germany under the communist system had a flat fee no matter how much water you used. Ordinarily, as our standard of living goes up, we use more water. West Germany had a much higher standard of living, used one-fourth as much water per capita as East Germany. Then when Germany was united, they started charging people for the amount of water used. In East Germany water consumption went down dramatically.

There are inconsistencies. Talking here with Jeff (Stuck), Tucson, Arizona charges less for water than Peoria, Illinois. Peoria, Illinois, is rich in water - we have more water than we know what to do with out there. It doesn't make any sense. Our local newspaper had a story about what water districts in our area charge just the other day. Carbondale charges \$2.64 per thousand gallons, Anna, right next door, \$16.79 per two thousand gallons, Christopher, each household pays \$21.80 for water, it doesn't make any difference how much water you use. Almost every state, incidentally, has some water districts that just have a flat fee, which really doesn't make any sense. West Frankfurt, \$9.25 for the first one thousand gallons and \$2.74 per thousand gallons after that. Again, that doesn't make any sense.

Conservation means reuse of water. It means a lot of things. It means when you construct a home, you don't put the hot water heater over on one end of the house and the shower over on the other end of the house, so you have to use a lot of water before you get hot water.

Short-term and long-term also is the whole question of water quality, pollution that you're concerned about. What is happening in the world's aquifers generally is they are declining, and as they decline, we have more of a quality problem.

If I had a glass of water here that's almost full, and I put a teaspoon of toxic substance in it, you have a certain level of toxicity within that glass. If I have half a glass, and you put a teaspoon in, you double the toxic factor. That means that when ground water declines, the aquifers decline, and farmers say we're not using any more fertilizer, industry is saying we're not polluting anymore, they're probably correct, but you cause more problems.

Israel, for example, is dependent on two large aquifers, one smaller aquifer, but they're declining, and the water quality is declining. Israel has the highest standards of any country in the Middle East, but they're not as high as Western European and U.S. standards, and all kinds of things happen that you don't anticipate. In Israel, for example, because of the quality of the water, people don't drink

as much water. You have nine times as many kidney stones per capita in Israel as in the United States. These are little things that happen when we don't have quality water.

Long-term, there are two principal answers, and then one other thing I want to mention. We have to encourage family planning, and I recognize the sensitivity of it. I disagree with the Administration in its veto of U.N. funds, but there is a way of getting around that, and it's a way that we ought to be looking at. We can encourage education for girls and women in developing nations. No one should object to that, and when you increase education for girls and women in developing nations, you see those population statistics go down fairly dramatically. We have to recognize that's part of the overall problem.

The second long-term thing we have to work on much more is desalination. Ninety-seven percent of the earth's water is salt water, of the remaining three percent, two-thirds is tied up in icebergs and snow. We're creeping ahead in the use of desalination, but the problems are leaping at us. Tampa is building the largest plant in the United States right now, and they're planning another one already. The cost, incidentally, of desalination has dropped dramatically in the last five years because of research and developments.

Every time we build a plant, we learn something. Saudi Arabia uses more than any other country. Saudi Arabia has cheap energy. I don't know what a barrel of oil costs in Saudi Arabia, maybe fifty cents, but it's kind of interesting, Saudi Arabia was growing about eight percent of their own food. Saudi Arabia, because of desalination now, is a food exporter. You take water, and you can put it on anything other than rocks, and you can be growing some kind of food, some kind of products. Desalination is clearly a direction that we're going to have to move in much, much more, and I would add, in the Middle East, they are ready--if we can get some stability--they're ready to move ahead very dramatically in Israel, and the Palestinian Authority, and elsewhere.

The final thing, this may involve some of you, talking about looking long-term, we're going to have to work out some kind of international mechanism to monitor agreements. Agreements are hard to achieve. In the United States, we don't fight each other ordinarily over water, but in the United States, we have had a Congressionally approved treaty between our states on water only two times in our history. The Colorado River Compact, and one between California and Nevada on the Truckee River, which I'd never heard of before I started working on this water situation.

Let's just say we get an agreement in the Middle East on water. Someone's going to have to monitor that. The Israelis are not going to trust the Palestinians, the Palestinians are not going to trust the Israelis, the Syrians are not going to trust the Turks, the Turks are not going to trust the Syrians, and so forth. We're going to have to have some type of mechanism, and I tend to think the World Bank is the place to have it. Maybe this group can be part of doing some thinking on where we're going on this. We also will need, just as the western states have water courts, I think we will eventually need some kind of an international water court because the International Court of Justice at the Hague frankly is just not technically equipped to decide some of these things, but I think if you have the technicians, generally you can avoid the legal problems.

I'm going to add just one other thing. When you get to be seventy-four, no matter how slow you are at learning, you learn a few things, and one of the things I have learned is that the small things really make a difference. That is the difference between people who are leaders and those who are not leaders. The leaders are willing to do the extra little things, and let me just give you one quick illustration. I mentioned the Middle East.

You may remember Lebanon had a civil war, and it spilled over into Israel's northern boundary, and Israel went into Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority was in Beirut, the Capitol of Lebanon, and they had a choice of escaping to Algeria, Libya or Tunisia. Algeria and Libya were militantly anti-Israel. Tunisia, for whatever reasons, adopted a more moderate policy, and they decided to go to Tunisia.

After they were there about six or eight months, Chairman Arafat started to make some positive sounds, and Senator Harry Reid of Nevada and Senator Russ Feingold of Wisconsin and I flew to Tunis to meet with Chairman Arafat, and while we were there we paid a courtesy visit on the President of Tunisia. During the course of the conversation, I said "Mr. President, I applaud your moderate stance, but your giant neighbors are criticizing you, and extremists within your country are criticizing you. Why do you follow this moderate stance?" He said, "Well, we don't talk much about it," but then he told about the difficulties his family had during World War II, and then he said, "and a Jewish family took me in." A Jewish family took in a little twelve year old Arab-Muslim boy and may have changed history. We all change history, either by what we do positively, or what we do negatively, or through our indifference, turning it over to others. All of you who are here happen to be involved in something that is very key to the future of civilization. I want you to change history positively. Thank you.