

WATER — THE CRISIS IS NOW

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Water is our most essential natural resource. That would seem to be too obvious to need stating, except that we have never treated water as scarce or valuable.

It is a truism to state that water is an essential resource. A national water crisis would have damaging implications for everyone everywhere. My own awareness of water as the essence of life developed gradually as I grew up in Kansas and began to realize that much of the world depends on the agricultural wonders of the nation's Bread Basket.

On the High Plains, depletion of the Ogallala aquifer is a major concern. Western Kansas is highly dependent on this rapidly declining source of water, as are parts of seven other states in the nation's Bread Basket.

I've given and continue to give my support to legislation to establish a program to assess the potential for groundwater recharge in the High Plains States. This proposal is an important step toward establishing the viability of recharge techniques as a solution to groundwater depletion.

National Implications

This has national implications, as does another Kansas concern that holds my attention. That is the general area of soil and water conservation. I am an active supporter of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's efforts in this area.

Simply put, we have a vital national interest in conserving water used in agriculture. As ranking majority member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I try to keep a watchful eye on soil and water resources, because they are the foundation of agriculture and the nation's economy.

That is not the only area in Congress where I involve myself in water issues. As Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, I find myself in a position to play a major role in developing financing options for water quality projects.

In both of these areas I come in daily contact with water problems and water constituen-

cies from all sections of the country and all positions on the spectrum of water politics.

It is difficult to synthesize the actions of just these two committees, — agriculture and finance — and trying to coordinate these committee goals with all of the other committees considering water resource legislation is an impossible task.

We in the legislative branches at all levels of government need a resource of facts and opinion that represents the big picture.

That makes me a firm believer in the role of the National Water Alliance. Clearly water policy for the nation must be more than federal pronouncements and governmental rules and regulations.

A glance at the Alliance's Board of Directors tells us what else is involved: Representatives from The Coca-Cola Company, FMC Corporation, 3-M Co., The Signal Companies; my former Senate colleagues Gaylord Nelson, now of the Wilderness Society, and Robert Taft; plus other environmental and academic representatives.

The Crisis

These are representatives of the organizations and institutions that can make things happen in this country.

It has been said many times that the next major crisis this country must face is water. However, it may not present itself with the dramatic suddenness of an oil embargo or polluted air.

Actually the crisis is here now. It is a crisis of awareness, of understanding what we need to do, and how we must do it. The economic consequences of our continuing failure to play for the most fair and effective use of water are perhaps immeasurable. These costs, however — and they are immense — are a large part of every businessman's cost of doing business.

So it is easy to ignore, this water problem. That makes our job all the more difficult. We must continue to find ways and means of pointing out the crisis and supporting efforts to solve it before a national tragedy occurs. ■