Statement of Senator Feinstein on National Water Supply Technology Act

July 14, 2004

"I am pleased today to join Senators Domenici and Bingaman and Congressmen Pombo and Calvert to introduce much needed legislation to improve our Nation's water supply.

Everyone in the West knows that we desperately need to increase our water supplies and improve our water quality.

That is why I have been working for more than a decade on CALFED legislation, to fund a balanced program of increased water storage, improvements to water quality, and new and better ways to use the water that we have.

The legislation we introduce today is a step beyond CALFED.

The National Water Supply Technology Act is a major program to fund research and development of new technologies to ensure that our water supply is adequate for the future.

There is no doubt that increasing population and development, drought, and contamination will continue to strain our water supplies in the coming decades. That is why we need to provide the leadership now to find solutions to our water challenges, particularly on the emerging contamination crisis of the rocket fuel chemical perchlorate in our water and food supplies.

This bill would establish a national center at Sandia Labs in New Mexico, and 8 regional centers, including one at Lawrence Livermore Lab in California. It would also create a policy center to provide the technology program with relevant policy research.

In addition, it would authorize $200 million per year from 2005 through 2009 for research and development.

This would mark the first major Federal investment in the development of water supply technology in over 20 years.

All of this means a major infusion of federal dollars to find new ways to recycle, decontaminate, and desalinate water.

One of the roles that these centers would play is to find innovative solutions to emerging water crises.

The contamination of perchlorate is a pervasive and dangerous problem plaguing our water supply and which recently has permeated into the food chain. Some of the funding in this legislation would go for research into ways to remove perchlorate from ground and other water supplies.

Exposure to perchlorate may adversely affect human health, especially in vulnerable and sensitive populations like young children and newborns.

Perchlorate has been identified as a contaminant of drinking water sources or in the environment in 34 States and has been used or manufactured in 44 States. California alone has more than 350 affected water sources, including the Colorado River, which irrigates 1.4 million acres of farmland in Arizona and California.

The costs associated with the clean up of perchlorate from our drinking water using current technologies are astronomical – reaching nearly $1 million in capital costs per drinking well and $500,000 in annual operating costs.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved language in the FY 2005 Defense Appropriations Bill to provide $4 million to clean up perchlorate in the Inland Empire of California.

Additionally, the Senate approved an amendment to the Department of Defense (DOD) Authorization bill that I sponsored, calling on the Pentagon to remediate perchlorate contamination on DOD sites.

Currently there is no national standard to measure perchlorate contamination in drinking water supplies, though California has set a public health goal of 6 parts per billion in drinking water. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is expected to complete a report later this year on the effects of perchlorate on human health. It is anticipated that following the NAS report, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will issue a national standard for the level of perchlorate in drinking water.

Clearly, we must find new and more efficient ways to keep our water supply unpolluted and abundant.

The advancements that will be possible because of this legislation are necessary to ensure that we have plenty of clean water for years to come.

I am pleased to cosponsor the National Water Supply Technology Act."

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