



**PACIFIC
INSTITUTE**

Research for People and the Planet

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

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Dear President Bush,

The Pacific Institute is calling today for the creation of a **National Water Commission for the 21st Century** to direct an aggressive new effort to protect our national water resources and to advise the country on how to best to participate in addressing the global water crisis. The benefits of such an effort will include a stronger national economy, improved international security, and more sustainable water use around the world.

The United States has not had a national water commission in place for 30 years, since the 1968 National Water Commission reported to the President and Congress in 1973. Moreover, we have never had a national water commission with the authority and responsibility to review and advise on the role of the U.S. in addressing international water issues.

Yet, as we enter the 21st century, pressures on water resources here and abroad are growing and conflicts among water users are worsening. Millions of people, mostly young children, die annually in the poorest countries from preventable water-related diseases. Controversy is growing over the proper role of expensive dams and infrastructure, private corporations, and local communities in managing water. Climate change, development, and pollution are increasingly threatening our own water systems and water resources in other nations.

In the United States, municipalities are faced with billions of dollars of infrastructure needs and growing disputes over the role of public and private water management. Arguments among western states over allocations of shared rivers are rising, as are tensions between cities and farmers over water rights. The U.S. and Mexico have unresolved disagreements over the Colorado and Rio Grande/Rio Bravo rivers, and our Canadian neighbors are concerned about proposals to divert Great Lakes or Canadian water for U.S. use. Communities are facing new challenges in meeting water quality standards and ensuring safe drinking water is available for all.

Despite the range of threats to water resources across the world, the United States has not offered adequate leadership in providing resources, education, and its vast technological and financial experience to address these problems. And the United States

has not been as effective as it could be in addressing global and national water problems. Our leadership is critical to any successful effort to seriously address the global water crisis. And leadership in this arena will bring a host of benefits to the United States and the world.

By protecting critical wetlands, aquifers, and water sources, as well as taking action to fight global warming, we can ensure our continued access to clean water. This has many obvious benefits to public health and the economy. By helping those without access to clean drinking water overseas, we will improve the lives of some of the world's poorest people, in turn helping them to become more productive and self-sufficient. This will improve global security and strengthen the world economy.

In many cases, the resolution of these problems requires smart state and local action. But national policies and actions are also needed, as is leadership at the national level. Unfortunately, there is inadequate attention being given to national water issues, and what efforts are being made are often contradictory or counterproductive. Responsibility for water is spread out over many federal agencies and departments, operating with no overall coordination.

It is time for a new national water commission. We therefore call for the creation of a **National Water Commission for the 21st Century** to provide guidance and direction on the appropriate role of the United States in addressing national and international water issues. The Commission must be non-partisan and include representation from across the many disciplines affected, including the sciences, economics, public policy, federal and local governments, public interest groups, and appropriate private sectors. While the duration of the Commission should be fixed, adequate financial resources should be provided to permit it to do a serious and effective job.

The goals of the Commission should include:

- Re-evaluate national water science and policy and offer guidance on integrating efforts now scattered among disparate and uncoordinated federal agencies and departments. National budget priorities should also be re-evaluated and restructured to ensure that the national objectives are more clearly supported.
- Recommend revisions or better enforcement of national laws related to water, including laws governing water quality, the protection of aquatic ecosystems, the financing of water infrastructure, and national standards for improving water-use efficiency and conservation.
- Develop recommendations for implementing overdue changes to national flood and drought management and the management of our groundwater resources.
- Work with appropriate agencies to identify necessary steps to ensure the physical security of the nation's water resources and water infrastructure.

- Develop recommendations for the U.S. role in identifying and addressing global water problems, including how to significantly accelerate efforts to meet the large and devastating unmet basic human needs for water in poorer countries. These recommendations should address how best to apply the vast financial, educational, technological, and institutional expertise of the United States to these problems.
- Explore how to deal with the growing and potential severe consequences of global climate change for both national and international water resources.
- Make recommendations for reducing the risks of international tensions over shared water resources. This includes addressing concerns with our own neighbors, Mexico and Canada, as well as in international rivers where our experience, international stature, and expertise can be effective.

It is past time for an integrated and comprehensive national water strategy and for a stronger effort by this nation in solving water problems abroad. While many water issues will remain local, to be resolved by community participation and actions, our national government can no longer ignore the positive and effective role it can play both here and abroad.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Peter H. Gleick
President

Distribution List