

Remarks on Signing the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996*August 6, 1996*

Thank you. I'd like to begin by thanking Diana Neidle for her years of work in this cause and all the other environmental and community workers who are here who have also labored in this vineyard. I want to thank Secretary Browner and the others at the EPA who have done such good work on this legislation, and the Members of Congress who are here and those who are not here who were active. Senator Warner, Senator Kempthorne, thank you especially for your efforts in this. I know how long and hard you worked on it. Representative Boehlert and Borski and Oberstar and Waxman and Norton who did such good work, and the others who were mentioned by Carol Browner who are not here.

I thank Governor Voinovich and the mayors and the commissioner and the State senator who have come here today because their constituents will be affected by it, and the way they govern will be, I believe, eased and improved as a result of this legislation.

This legislation represents a real triumph because it demonstrates what we can achieve here in Washington and in our country when we turn away from partisanship and embrace shared values. Last week I was proud to sign the Food Quality Protection Act, which passed with full bipartisan support. I said then and I'd like to repeat today that I think a fundamental promise we must make to our people is that the food they eat and the water they drink are safe. American families, after all, have enough to worry about without having to worry about whether that glass of water Diana talked about that you might offer to a child or a grandchild will be contaminated.

Today we come together in that same spirit of bipartisanship to celebrate another cornerstone in the foundation of security for American families. The Safe Drinking Water Act is terribly important. I know that many of us take safe drinking water for granted. Unfortunately, it's not always so. I came into office determined to change this. In 1993, I asked Congress to strengthen our drinking water laws to meet the challenges we face

today and the ones we will face in the future. I am proud to say that the proposals I made then were at the heart of the law I will sign today.

Americans do have a right to know what's in their drinking water and where it comes from before they turn on their taps. Under the new law, water authorities will be required to tell them. Americans have a right to trust that every precaution is being taken to protect their families from dangerous and sometimes even deadly contaminants like cryptosporidium. The new law sets high standards that consider the special needs of children, the elderly, people living with AIDS and weak immune systems.

Americans have the right to believe that Government is doing everything it can to keep water systems safe. The new law requires it to act. It protects the sources of our drinking water from pollution. Even more important, it authorizes nearly \$10 billion in loan funds to help communities all across our Nation upgrade their drinking water systems.

I hope that Congress, and I believe that Congress, will now take the steps necessary to release all of the available monies to communities as quickly as possible. As some of you know, just by chance, the law passed a few hours too late to access money that had been set aside. But the law passed with such strong and passionate support, I believe it will be forthcoming.

Today we helped to ensure that every family in America will have safe, clean drinking water to drink every time they turn on a faucet or stop at a public water fountain. From now on our water will be safer, and our country will be healthier for it.

Again, let me say there are environmental and consumer and public health groups represented here who work so hard to make this happen, and it wouldn't have happened without you. Again, let me say that Congress performed so very well in this endeavor, coming together, working together, securing our future together.

This has been a good couple of weeks for positive achievement: these environmental laws, a higher minimum wage, incentives for small businesses, health reform, meaningful

welfare reform. This is what Government should do and how we should work together.

Now, let me just say one other thing in passing. You know, the First Lady's had the chance to represent our country around the world on a couple of occasions, talking to women and mothers and grandmothers around the world. The absence of safe drinking water is the single biggest health threat to poor children all over the world, to tens of millions of them. The number of children that die in other countries from the absence of safe drinking water is absolutely staggering. I have always hoped that our country would be able to do more to help to alleviate this problem, which can be done without great expense compared to the conditions which exist in other nations. But when I became President and I realized how much more we had to do here, I thought at the time that before we can attempt to do all we might do for poor children everywhere else in the world, we ought to take care of all the children in this country who are entitled to safe drinking water so we can set the proper example.

That's what we're doing today. I am very grateful to every one of you who had a role in this.

And now I'd like to ask the children to come up and stand around me as I sign this law, because, after all, they're what the law's all about. I'd like to invite the Members of Congress who are here. And Governor, I'd like to ask you to come up as well to represent the State and local officials that are here and what they have at stake. So if you all come up, we'll sign the law.

[At this point, the President signed the legislation.]

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:20 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to safe drinking water advocate Diana Neidle and Gov. George V. Voinovich of Ohio. S. 1316, approved August 6, was assigned Public Law No. 104-182.

Statement on Signing the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996

August 6, 1996

Today I am pleased to sign into law S. 1316, the "Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996." This Act will provide the American people with much greater protection for the drinking water on which we all rely every day of our lives.

Safe drinking water is the American people's first line of defense for public health. In 1993, my Administration called for reinvention of safe drinking water law to improve public health protection. This Act achieves this objective by following the basic principles we articulated. It balances responsible regulatory improvements with common-sense measures to help States and water systems prevent drinking water contamination problems in the first place. It also authorizes for the first time the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds that I first proposed in 1993. These Funds will provide the resources for drinking water infrastructure that will help hundreds of communities to protect their people from harmful contaminants.

Regrettably, the Congress failed to pass this legislation prior to the August 1 deadline, so the \$725 million of previously appropriated funds are no longer available for the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds and have been transferred to the Clean Water Program. I urge the Congress to act promptly to correct this problem and to restore these monies to the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds as soon as possible.

The Act is in several respects a model for responsible reinvention of regulations. It replaces an inflexible approach with the authority to act on contaminants of greatest risk and to analyze costs and benefits, while retaining public health as the paramount value. It embraces principles of pollution prevention and a cost-effective, community-based approach for ensuring drinking water safety. It affirms the right of all Americans to know about the quality of their drinking water and the potential threats to its safety.