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BILL INTRODUCED TO SPUR PROGRESS OF DESALINATION TECHNOLOGY

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On the day before Earth Day and against a backdrop of worsening water shortages throughout America, legislation to get the federal government more involved in solving the water crisis by providing assistance to entities that successfully develop desalination plants has been introduced in the House, it was announced today.

The bill, H.R. 3834, would establish within the Department of Energy a program to provide Energy Assistance Payments to desalination projects following a competitive process (RFP). Funding for the program would come from DOE's renewable energy program. Two hundred million dollars would be authorized.

"This is a modest funding request for a crisis of such enormous magnitude," stated Hal Furman, Executive Director of the newly created U. S. Desalination Coalition. "Put bluntly, America is running out of drinkable water. Continued population growth in many parts of the country, exacerbated by worsening drought conditions and lowering water tables, have created a crisis situation that we can no longer afford to ignore."

"Now is the time for the federal government to recognize the critical challenges we are facing nationwide in securing reliable and safe water supplies for our future," said Bernie Rhinerson, Chairman of the U.S. Desalination Coalition and Chairman of the San Diego, California Water Authority. "With this federal support, we can realize the promise of desalination as an affordable and environmentally responsible source of much needed clean water for growing families and businesses in water starved regions around our country."

Fresh water is produced from seawater or brackish water through a desalination process that removes salt and other minerals.

"Taking water from the ocean, the world's largest reservoir, and converting it and brackish water into pure, clean water for homes, businesses and farms has been an American dream for many decades," Furman noted. "Desalination technology has existed for many years but has not always been economically viable. However, over the past ten years we have witnessed a significant drop in desalination costs. In 1990 the cost of desalinating an acre foot of seawater was \$2,000. That figure has been cut more than half to \$900 today. Passage of H.R. 3834 can only have the effect of narrowing the cost differential further."

Furman noted 70% of Saudi Arabia's drinking water comes from the ocean. In the U.S., there are a number of seawater and brackish water desalination plants under development. A recently completed facility in Tampa, Florida, will eventually produce 28 million gallons of water per day for the Tampa Bay region.

"Whether these projects and others like them get built in time to address the nation's mounting water supply crisis is largely dependent on whether the federal government makes a commitment to invest in this new infrastructure as it has previously in all manner of other important water related infrastructure, including potable water treatment, irrigation, flood control, and wastewater treatment," said Furman, who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water & Science in the Reagan Administration.

The U.S. Desalination Council is comprised currently of thirteen water agencies and utilities from California to Florida dedicated to advocating an increased federal role in advancing desalination, both seawater and brackish, as a viable long-term method of meeting America's water supply needs.

The Council has placed a print advertisement in Roll Call to coincide with today's press conference about H.R. 3834.

Also present at the press conference were three original co-sponsors of the bill: U.S. Rep. Jim Davis (D-FL), U.S. Rep. Heather Wilson (R-NM) and U.S. Rep Richard Pombo (R-CA). Congressman Pombo is Chairman of the House Resources Committee, to which H.R. 3834 has been referred.