Senator Pete Domenici *was born in Albuquerque, graduated from The University of New Mexico in 1954, from Denver University Law School in 1958, and was admitted to the New Mexico bar the same year. He was elected as a Republican to the United States Senate in 1972 and reelected in 1978, 1984, 1990, 1996, and again in 2002 for the term ending January 3, 2009. Domenici has served longer in the U.S. Senate than any other New Mexican in history. He has chaired the Committee on the Budget (1995-January 3, 2001; January 20, 2001-June 6, 2001) and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources (2003-). Senator Domenici has been the prime supporter of the Tularosa Basin National Desalination Research Facility in Alamogordo, now under construction.*

OPENING REMARKS

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Hello, I'm Senator Pete Domenici and it is my pleasure to speak with you today. Let me first extend my gratitude to the Water Research Institute for hosting the 49th annual water conference.

More and more people are moving to this beautiful state that we call home and we need to find a way to sustain our water needs to accommodate a growing population and most importantly, create new and better jobs. I am particularly pleased that the theme of this conference is water desalinization and reuse strategies for New Mexico. The use of water purification technology will be one of the key tools in our efforts to provide usable water for all New Mexicans.

I would like to have been with you today, in particular I would like to have gone with you to take the tour of the Tularosa Desalination Facility in Alamogordo. I have a keen interest in bringing less expensive, less energy intensive, and less wasteful water purification technology into common use in New Mexico and hopefully across the nation.

The Tularosa Desalination Facility, once complete, will allow us to do cost performance testing for new technology in order to reduce the financial risk of using a new technology for our communities. Improved technology will also help our access to much lower quality water, which is currently stored in the Tularosa Basin and basins like it.

Commissioner John Keys of the Bureau of Reclamation and I are working to have the facility ready to begin testing the new marine expeditionary force desalinization unit in the early spring. The facility should be completed by the end of 2005.

While the key theme of this conference is desalinization and water reuse, I need to provide you with a glimpse of the wider federal efforts we are undertaking to help our state and other water-stressed areas. We have a global water supply problem. In 1998, 28 countries experienced water stress or scarcity. That number is expected to rise to 800 million people in 56 countries by 2025. Water shortages will be faced by nearly every major city in the world over the next 20 years. New Mexico and the southwestern United States already know what I am talking about. Transfers and advanced water treatment are necessary. Our small communities are even more dramatically impacted.

Our solutions will require a broad set of tools including water markets, understanding our resources more completely, efficient use of existing supplies, and expanding water supplies. A key issue in establishing water markets is to build a cohesive understanding of water rights. In many regions of the West, Indian rights have not been adjudicated and this uncertainty affects a long-term investment needed to expand our water supplies. At this point, we are working on four such settlements that affect New Mexico alone. These negotiated settlements, if completed within a manageable budget, offer the best opportunity to support existing uses and to bring surety to the basins in conflict. Congress does not negotiate the settlements but I have directed a great deal of my staff time to study these settlements. All of them are difficult and all are expensive. But I am confident that we will persevere to completion. An equally important job related to water markets is assessing existing resources. We are working to support the Office of the State Engineer by providing support for the measurement of water resources within the state of New Mexico. Additionally, Senator Bingaman and I are developing a new program to assess the groundwater resources along the U.S.-Mexican border with initial focus on the basins in southern New Mexico.

Efficiency means more than just turning off the tap when you do not need water. It means rebuilding infrastructure in a way that utilizes every drop of diverted water to its maximum extent. However, the money to build or revitalize our infrastructure is lacking. To partially address this issue, I am pushing for a loan guarantee program for the Bureau of Reclamation. The money is intended to revitalize existing infrastructure with an eye to increasing all forms of efficiency.

Conservation is also essential, as you know. I am a strong proponent of two initiatives: to clean up our forest watersheds and to improve the health of our riparian bosque areas. Last year we were successful in passing healthy forest legislation. This year we hope to pass a salt cedar management demonstration program. New water supplies are essential. We must tap resources that have previously been unusable, like the large saline aquifers. We need to reuse water as we have been saying. The key issues to expanding water supplies are cost effective water treatment and appropriate disposal of waste by-products.

I am a believer in technology. I got together a bi-partisan group in the Senate along with a similar group in the House to introduce a bill to develop a new national program in water technology. Our desire is to revitalize U.S. water augmentation technology and the development effort that will accompany it. To do this, we are going to try to invest as much as $225 million a year in an array of technologies. Best of all, the national laboratories and universities of New Mexico, in partnership with their colleagues throughout the Southwest, will lead this effort.

A couple of weeks ago, I toured the city of Rio Rancho where they have a water reuse pilot plant and was very encouraged by what I saw. El Paso is also moving forward aggressively with desalinization. Alamogordo and Albuquerque are also making steps in this direction.

My goal is to give groups an opportunity to implement new technologies to address their water needs. It is my expectation that much of the development, testing, and manufacture of the next generation's water technology will occur in New Mexico if we are vigilant and work hard to make sure what we have is known. Those of you here are aware of the crisis we are facing and are dedicated to finding solutions and options that will address the water shortage. I am pleased to see so many water experts and policy makers gathered to discuss these problems and to look forward to their solutions. I look forward to them with you. We will do our part, you do yours.

Thank you very much and it is good to be with you.