

WOMEN'S INTEREST IN WATER PROBLEMS

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Women's interest in water problems is constant, direct, intimate, and philosophical. Because we wash clothes, dishes, and babies; because we water lawns and mop floors; and because we write the checks to pay utility bills; we are constantly, directly, and intimately reminded of the need for good water, dependable water, and economical water. We also think about water while we are doing all these things, and so we become interested in the philosophical problems connected with wise use of water in our bewildering society.

Members of my organization, the League of Women Voters, tend to be nosier than most in attempting to understand and do something about this bewilderment. One thing we have done is to put water resources on our national program agenda. For a long time we have studied water problems wherever they became apparent to us, and as a result we have come out officially in support of policies and procedures which promote comprehensive long-range planning for conservation and development of water resources and improvement of water quality.

The title suggested for this talk indicates that you want to know about women's interest in more specific water problems, particularly as they relate to a water plan for New Mexico in the next century. I hope you are prepared for the Pandora's Box you have opened.

From what we have already heard at this Conference, and at other Institute Conferences and other water meetings, we know that New Mexico is in good hands so far as imaginative planning is concerned. Good minds are at work, and we find this very reassuring. Engineers, economists, business men, politicians, agriculturists, sociologists, hydrologists - all kinds of experts who know their jobs well, are capable of working out answers for water problems including some we hadn't known about. This happy situation provides us with an opportunity to express our interest in the problems and to examine the solutions and proposals without responsibility for implementation - we'll leave all those "mere details" up to you experts. Our minds are for the most part uncluttered with specific knowledge, and so I will proceed in that state of bliss which is well known to accompany ignorance. I'll wade right into the water where you angels might fear to tread. (I'll try to forbear mention of treading water. One of the recurring problems concerning the subject of water seems to be the tempting ease with which it lends itself to bad puns.)

Earlier this year I sent a rough outline of this talk to Leaguers all over New Mexico. In return they told me about their interest in all kinds of water problems, along with comments on proposed solutions and even on the

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problems that are likely to arise out of the solution. All this was spiced with bits of gossip about what is going on in their communities and in the places where they and their families, hike, hunt, camp, fish, float or ski; and how they, their friends, and their cousins and their uncles and their aunts feel about it. Husbands were quoted at length and with respect that would warm your hearts, and I'll relay some of their more thought-provoking suggestions and comments later.

Women's interest in water problems is the same as our interest in any problems. We are interested in bringing about a satisfactory life for as many people as possible, as soon as possible, and as permanently as possible. Today I'll ignore the "possible" and talk about the problems and the solutions which interest us.

Women's interest in any problem is likely to start within their homes. We are interested in good and adequate water for our homes, and we prefer it to be soft, pleasant tasting, and economical.

We are interested in the more efficient use of water in our homes, too. We get criticized for our extravagant practices in the uses of water in our homes, and we are willing and even eager to reform. We will be happy to use appliances and plumbing designed to use less water more effectively and efficiently. Where can we get them? We welcome more information on how to manage our homes so that less water is used under existing conditions. Is there a handbook for this purpose? How do we get it?

Leaguers attending the water seminar in Portales last year were very interested in the remark of one speaker who observed that a brick in every toilet tank would save an impressive number of acre-feet of water. Some of us have tried it, but we haven't convinced any significant number of others to do so and results have been undiscernable. However, I was present at a gathering of Leaguers and their husbands (also known as the men's auxiliary) where there was talk of launching a League project using this speaker's idea. It was to be called, if I remember correctly, "A Gold Brick in Every Pot." At the time we were convinced that we had solved not only the problem of water shortage, but that of the gold drain as well. At this same symposium we finally came to the brilliant conclusion that what is basic to all water problems is over-population. A member of the League auxiliary came up with a suggestion for dissolving The Pill in the water supply. When the obvious objections were made by others present, he suggested His and Her water faucets to be used at the drinker's discretion. As you may have surmised by now, the water supply at this meeting was woefully inadequate.

Women are interested in new approaches to old problems where too much water is used and misused. Take problems of cleaning and waste disposal, for

example. How about these super-sonic devices for cleaning in our homes and elsewhere? Women are interested in any technique that will do the cleaning or waste disposal job, that will use very small amounts of water, that will be inexpensive, and that won't pollute anything. We leave the details up to you.

We are interested in having housekeeping made easier and homes cleaner and more comfortable - all without the use of water. We'd like to have our homes so free of dust and so easy to keep that by 2060 members of the League of Women Voters can concentrate on the problems of the Moon - where a good many people have indicated they wish we were already.

Women are interested in the sources of water for our homes, and in what happens to the water when it leaves our homes. We are interested in the economics involved in the ownership of the local water works, in the efficiency of the local sewage disposal plant, in the size of our water bills, in local ordinances dealing with lawn watering, and in the general attitude among both industrial and domestic users toward leaving water reasonably unpolluted when it is returned to the public domain.

Many of us live in the growing suburbs and we are interested in what sort of water and sewage systems are used there. We are interested in master plans for cities which take the problems of suburban water supply and sewage disposal into account, and which contain adequate plans for providing solutions to the problems. We are concerned about the danger that our underground water tables will be contaminated because of the increasing number of septic tanks. We are concerned that so little attention has been given to the threat of groundwater contamination. Women in the League realize that much of the problem is the result of public apathy and ignorance. Well, the official purpose of the League is to promote better government through informed and active citizen participation. Maybe we can help.

Women are interested in more than their immediate home and local water problems of course. Water problems everywhere arouse our interest and concern.

We are intensely interested in New Mexico. We are interested in preserving its priceless scenic beauty and those attractions of climate, tradition, and state of mind which brought many of us to live here in preference to our original homes. We like the space, the countryside, the traditions, the uninhibited inhabitants, and each other. We hope that by 2060 every New Mexican can choose his own most satisfactory way of living and can have an opportunity to earn enough money to afford it. We realize that water plays an infinitely important part in bringing about this happy condition.

Women are interested in legislation which deals with water problems. In every state and in Washington, Leaguers attend hearings and sessions dealing with them. We listen to testimony, try to find which other lobbyists represent who, and sometimes present statements. We are impressed with the importance of water power in politics and we have developed some appreciation of the effects of this power on the difficulties involved in solving the problems. We are interested in how legislation reflects pressures. We try to keep up with the resulting amoeba-like growth and rearrangement of all the outfits involved in coping with water problems.

Women sometimes wonder if perhaps the whole attitude toward management of water through legislation needs to be reconsidered. Let's assume that we can ignore tradition, pressure groups, and politics, and think in terms of what could be the best way to set up legislative rules for the use of our water. Couldn't there be a new and better approach to the whole business of water legislation? Somebody has mentioned doing away with county lines in such approaches - how about doing away with state lines and organizing the whole country according to the big river basins? Maybe by 2060 this will be Upper Rio Grande Basin University - how about that? The acronym URGBU has infinite possibility in college yells. Such universities might do much more to provide intelligent approaches to all kinds of related river basin problems, and they might be given more intelligent legislative support.

In short, women are interested in legislation which will result in a state (or a basin) filled with clear streams and prosperous people surrounded by lovely and unspoiled scenery, excellent roads, good schools, adequate markets for products, and happy fishermen, water skiers and yellow-rubber-boat nuts.

Women are interested in new sources of water, water now considered unuseable in our area - the brackish, the saline, and the polluted. We are told that New Mexico doesn't use nearly all the water it has available, but that much of the unused water is too brackish or saline or otherwise polluted to be useable. We are interested in the answers, and in more publicity for the answers, to such questions as these:

How is the work with salt tolerant plants going?

Is use of brackish water in the secondary recovery of oil practical?

Can saline and brackish water have the sal and brack removed economically enough so that its use is practical? Could this water be used in our homes?

Are there ways of turning waste products resulting from removing pollutants from all these unused waters into fringe benefits instead of further problems? Are they economically sound?

What is this about Kennecott Copper reusing water in its operation in Grant County? Are the processes applicable in other industries?

Is it possible to establish stringent standards for rural, municipal, and industrial withdrawals from both surface and underground sources so that careful reuse will be encouraged?

Are there techniques being used successfully elsewhere which would help solve water problems here? At the Jordan?

Women are interested in specific ways for individuals to make their livings, agriculture, for example.

We realize that New Mexico can never compete with the Imperial Valley in agricultural production, but it can certainly compete in providing satisfactory opportunities for its citizens. We are convinced that farming is the most satisfactory way of life for a good many people, and we are equally convinced that we would be more sensible to encourage such people to farm where they are most content rather than to force them to drift in desperation to large urban centers where they are miserable and where they can become involved in much greater, graver, and costlier problems than those posed by marginal farms, properly used.

Agriculture in New Mexico automatically means irrigation, of course, and irrigation automatically means water problems. We know that agriculture by irrigation is an ancient and honorable occupation in these parts - that there were thousands of miles of irrigation canals in the Southwest long before the Spanish brought in Pueblo Water Rights and casually documented royal land grants. We sometimes wonder what the pre-Columbian water rules were like.

Certainly since the days of Coronado the rules for irrigation have been proliferating and becoming increasingly complicated and confusing. Women hope that by 2060 irrigation laws will be sensible, effective, and productive. We are interested in irrigation practices which will give people who choose to farm a satisfactory life and which will take into account broader views of our over-all welfare in terms not only of gross national product, but in gross national satisfactions as well.

Women are interested in the work of such institutions as State University in development of better agricultural techniques. We occasionally visit your demonstration farms and wish there were a more ambitious program involving them. We hope that by 2060 demonstration farms will be an integral part of rural life all over New Mexico, or Rio Grande Basin, or whatever it's called then, and that they will be leading the way to improved

water management in agriculture, in better crops, and in more prosperity for everybody.

Other kinds of job opportunities interest women, too, of course. We recognize that water plays an infinitely important part in employment in New Mexico. We realize this means industry. We have noticed that a good many well publicized industries tend to bring their own workers and additional new problems with them, while others tend to exploit our natural resources in ways that do not result in beneficial use (if I may borrow a familiar phrase) so far as New Mexico's economy is concerned. We are interested in the development of industries that will use the people and the skills at hand as much as possible, with optimum benefit to New Mexico. This means special training and imaginative use of those skills and resources peculiar to New Mexico, but proof that it can be done exists in Laguna, in rare spots on the Navajo Reservation, and here and there in our larger population centers. Examples are disappointingly rare, and we hope they increase soon and regularly.

We hope that the talent of New Mexico's people for good cooking, good hand-crafts, and good manners, can be used to increase the number of job opportunities in ways that will provide jobs without drastic changes in established ways of life here. Travellers are all only too familiar with the rarity of the good things New Mexico can supply in the rest of our land of the fried and home of the slip-shod. Women are interested in seeing these attributes made the most of in ways that will provide good and interesting jobs with adequate pay. The connection with this ideal and water is, of course, through wise management of water for recreation, and careful conservation of as much of our natural beauty as possible, so that the necessary consumers will be at hand.

Women spend a lot of time going with our families on camping trips, hiking trips, skiing, fishing, and floating trips. We are often the ones who act as camp cooks, cleaners of fish (or providers of substitutes for uncaught fish), and pickers-up of the family yellow-rubber-boat nuts at the end of float trips. What this amounts to is that we do spend a lot of time waiting around and staring at lakes and streams. If you stare at water enough in our recreation areas you can't help noticing signs of administration agencies. Women are interested in the administration involved in water management.

We are heartened by signs of closer cooperation among the bureaus, agencies, corps, and departments involved.

We are concerned about the disadvantages under which local populations find themselves operating when large water projects are constructed in their areas. We are concerned with the way Parkinson's Law functions in the structure of

the various types of governmental organizations involved. We have an uneasy feeling that too often unblameable tables of organization can victimize the people in those organizations as well as the local citizens. Some of us women live in conservancy districts, soil conservation districts, watershed districts, and we see first hand that not everything works out as well as could be hoped. We are pleased that most of the people involved are interested in the problems and not their own personal stake in the process. We are sorry this is not true of all of them. We hope that by 2060 all these organizations will be staffed by well paid saints, operating in an atmosphere of well informed and cooperative local citizenry and industry, and administered by geniuses with technical background and human experience that enables them to understand problems instantly, appreciate new ideas and properly reward their creators, understand the personal problems of all staff members involved, and produce flawless public relations and working arrangements with the news media and the involved local population. It goes without saying that a warm rapport will exist between these administrators and all other administrative heads on all levels of international, national, state and local organization - and even with their interplanetary counterparts which will undoubtedly exist in 2060. The Chambers of Commerce and the Sierra Clubs will love them, one and all.

Women are interested in the ideas and proposals that have come from even our present day less-than-perfect government water organizations. We are sometimes dumbfounded by the scope - but we're interested. We come away from some meetings with the feeling that by 2060 this continent will be one great swirl of water from the Great Lakes, Canada, the Mississippi, Missouri, and the Northwest, gurgling and rippling through engineering marvels throughout the Southwest and on into Mexico. Some of us have association with scientific experts in our own homes, and have discerned a charming but alarming tendency for wanting to try something big, disregarding the cost! Women are interested in costs, and we are interested in knowing if all other water sources are being adequately explored, even if they aren't so glamorous and appealing. We are interested in Mr. Dominy's report on costs and we wonder what all this will mean to our descendents when they pay their water bills and tax bills in 2060. We wonder, too, what will be happening back in Michigan, Louisiana, Saskatchewan, and Oregon?

We hear a lot about weather management - particularly in newsletters coming from the office of Senator Anderson. We know he has produced remarkable developments in Twenty-First Century type scientific industry before, and we wouldn't really be surprised to see him get this one started too. We are sure we'll be happy to have snow-on-demand on our ski slopes, rain-on-demand in our agricultural and residential areas, and sunshine-on-demand for our family picnics. We are interested in the solutions for problems arising out of weather manage-

ment, too. Even in our blissfully ignorant state we can foresee that the legal, technical, and sociological problems will be formidable. For now, we'll just leave those details up to you.

When we think of wise water management in the next hundred years, we realize that probably most important of all is flexibility in approach to the problems. Nobody can predict what we will be faced with, or in what sequence the problems will arise, and which solutions will create more problems than they solve. Women are interested in helping to create an atmosphere of well informed citizens who will accept imaginative and intelligent approaches even when they aren't dramatic and even when they are unfamiliar. Each problem deserves its own special consideration and all points of view must be respected. In order to arrive at this Utopian situation, we feel that people must become informed and active participants in the solving of the problems. Government must supply the machinery through which this participation is possible. Women in the League know from experience how difficult this can be, but we also know from experience that it is possible.

I couldn't help thinking, as I worked on this talk, what a housewife in Las Cruces in 1868 might have said if she had been asked to talk about water and what she hoped to see in its development by 1960. No matter how wild her imagination, nor how impossible her proposals might have sounded in 1868, she couldn't have come near to the realities of what has happened to water use during that time.

We hope you professionals won't underestimate your possibilities. You and your predecessors have accomplished the wildly impossible with regularity for over a hundred years now.

Women are interested to see what in the world you will be doing in the next hundred.