

Congressional Report

Drinking Water Standard Bill Passes

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Congress finished action yesterday on a \$156 million bill designed to safeguard citizen's drinking water, establishing for the first time national minimum standards.

The bill has been debated for four years, with opposition from the oil industry and to some degree from the White House.

There have been indications that President Ford would veto the bill. To guard against a pocket veto after Congress adjourns permanently, the

Senate and House agreed on a final version sooner than expected.

The House accepted the bill with no debate and by a voice vote, including a Senate amendment that guarantees citizens the right to bring suits against public water systems starting 27 months after enactment. The delay is designed to give local systems time to put the new standards into effect.

The Environmental Protection Agency would be authorized to set national minimum drinking water standards, which would be enforced by the states. If the states are derelict, the EPA could step in.

The bill also provides for public water systems to notify media and consumers if safe water standards are violated.

It also includes safeguards for underground water supplies.

Rep. Paul G. Rogers—(D-Fla.), chief author of the bill, said it "climaxes a lengthy effort on the part of health officials and those concerned with public safety. I think we'll realize the benefits of this in the very near future. Looking back, it is amazing that we had not done this years ago."

Tax Benefits Veto

The House failed to override President Ford's veto of a bill that would have provided \$130 million in tax benefits for victims of several natural disasters that occurred in 1972.

The vote was 249 in favor of overriding the veto,

17 votes short of the required two-thirds majority.

The bill would have provided special tax relief for victims of such disasters as Hurricane Agnes; the Buffalo Creek, W. Va., dam failure, and the Rapid City, S.D., floods.

In his veto message, Mr. Ford said the bill would have resulted in "favored treatment for a select group of taxpayers... a windfall... a very undesirable precedent."

But, in urging the House to override the veto, Rep. Al Ullman (D-Ore.) contended "it was wrong of the President to want to tax these poor people in this limited amount of relief."

All eight Maryland members voted to override the veto, while all 10 Virginians voted to sustain it.

Tapes Agreement

The House passed by voice vote a measure which would nullify an agreement former President Nixon made with a government agency giving him possession of his tape recordings.

The measure will be sent to the Senate to adjust minor differences before it goes to the White House.

The U.S. District Court already had issued a temporary restraining order barring any movement of the tapes provided in the Sept. 7 agreement signed by Nixon and the General Services Administration.

Judge Charles Richey, who issued the order last month, has said he would welcome congressional action in the case. The bill would give Richey a reference in law for his final ruling.

The measure would provide that the GSA retain custody of all tapes, papers and other materials which might be historically significant to Nixon's presidency. It would bar destruction of any of the material unless provided by law.

President Ford has given special prosecutor Henry S. Ruth Jr. access to the tapes for use in the Watergate cover-up trial, and the tapes Ruth wanted have been played in open court.