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## EDITOR'S DESK

### RALLY CRY

*Water Matters!* was the slogan of a rally dedicated to communicating the importance of safe and clean drinking water and securing support for promoting water issues with government leaders. Staged on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, more than 1,500 people attended the demonstration that took place during the 2001 American Water Works Association's (AWWA) Annual Conference and Exposition in Washington, D.C., on June 20.

Free shuttle buses transported rally participants armed with signs and wearing T-shirts with the slogan on them from the Convention Center to hear administration officials and members of Congress. Christine Whitman, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator and five congressional leaders on safe drinking water issues spoke at the rally.

"Clean drinking water is something we often take for granted," Whitman said. "We need to recognize that we have to have an adequate supply. First and foremost we need to protect and preserve our valuable clean water."

Also speaking at the rally were Sen. Bob Smith (R-NH), Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), Rep. Robert Borski (D-PA), Rep. John Duncan (R-TN) and Rep. Paul Gillmor (R-OH). Most of the congressional speakers focused their remarks on the past success of the drinking water profession in improving water quality in the United States. In addition, they touched on their views on how government can support providers with the problems that they face.

"Clean, safe drinking water is not a partisan issue, it is an American priority .... Guaranteeing our nation clean, safe water requires a long-term commitment to our water infrastructure," Smith said.

Since water quality standards have tightened for drinking water, utilities have tried to get Congress more involved with protecting source water from pollution and to assist in rebuilding the water infrastructure. "EPA looks forward to addressing non-point source pollution. It is one of the most important issues we face today," Whitman said.

The rally was a step in the right direction for the industry. It brought drinking water leaders and legislators together.

"There can be no question that the work of tap water providers and federal regulators is intertwined," said AWWA executive director Jack Hoffbuhr. "Today's *Water Matters!* rally demonstrates the commitment of AWWA and the rest of the drinking water community to working with the federal government to ensure America's public health is always protected."

While the commitment of the AWWA and drinking water professionals has never been questioned, getting politicians to invest time and money will be a hard task. For example, at the *H<sub>2</sub>O Open Forum: The Political Perspective* on the rally morning, a Senator and Congressman sent their aides to address the crowded session instead of attending themselves. While these aides were knowledgeable, with the Conference being in Washington D.C. the drinking water professionals in the audience deserved the actual legislators to hear their concerns.

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