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Notes for remarks by

**The Honourable Ruth Grier  
Minister of the Environment**

**To the American Water Works Association  
and the Ontario Municipal Water Association**

**Safe Drinking Water and other  
Environmental Initiatives**

**Hamilton, Ontario  
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It gives me great pleasure to meet you here this morning. Both the American Water Works Association and the Ontario Municipal Water Association have long been recognized for their commitment to providing consumers with safe drinking water. We have a lot of common interests and I look forward to working with you.

I've been Minister of the Environment for almost seven months now and its been an interesting and busy time. It's exciting to be able to move forward with some of the initiatives that I fought so hard for when I was environment critic in the House.

I have a great advantage in that this government has a high level of commitment to the environment.

The scope and clarity of the NDP's environmental agenda was a major factor in our victory in the last election: Ontarians voted for a green government that would give the highest priority to the restoration and preservation of our natural heritage.

You may remember that last June the NDP released a document, **Greening the Party,**

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**Greening the Province**, which spelled out our environment, resources and energy policy. It was both a philosophical statement and a practical guide for action.

Now we are doing our best to make good on our campaign commitments despite the fact that we have come into power in a time of recession. The Ontario Treasury is not in as good a shape as we had been led to believe. Therefore, we can't move ahead quickly on as many fronts as we'd like to, but I assure you that this government is deeply committed to immediate and strong action in the environmental arena.

We have established our priorities and a number of them coincide with your areas of interest. These include:

- Protecting water quality
- Maintaining essential water and sewage services
- Safe drinking water
- The Environmental Bill of Rights

The Environmental Bill of Rights will grant every individual in the province specific environmental rights and will provide the tools for that individuals and groups to act on behalf of a better environment.

This legislation is particularly important to me.

As many of you know, I first introduced a private member's bill for an Environmental Bill of Rights in 1986 and updated it in 1989. Unfortunately, like most private member's bills, it didn't get very far.

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However, the current government committed itself in our throne speech to immediate action in this area and I will be introducing a Bill of Rights later this year.

To ensure that the new legislation is in keeping with the NDP policy of providing a broad opportunity for public input on all major decisions, I appointed an advisory council of 25 members last December to review the principles to be incorporated in the bill. As well, we have received more than 200 written submissions from individuals and interest groups.

I know that the American Water Works Association made a submission to the committee. I appreciate your thoughtful and technical advice.

Following all that input, the process of drafting the new legislation has begun.

Although, I can't elaborate at this time on exactly what the bill will include, I can tell you that we are paying close attention to the following principles:

1. The public's right to protect the environment
2. The enforcement of this right through improved access to the courts, including the right to sue polluters
3. Increased public participation in environmental decision-making
4. Increased government accountability for the environment, and
5. Greater protection for employees who "blow the whistle" on polluting employers.

Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights will support the new environmental ethic and will encourage the development of creative partnerships among the different segments of society. I'm very confident that it will serve us all.

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Now let's take a look at another area which is of keen interest to everyone here--safe drinking water.

I know that the AWWA has been working in Canada since 1916 to promote safe drinking water and that the Ontario section is regarded as being a leader in North America.

The theme that you have chosen for this year's conference -- Our Water Resources: Limited, Valuable, Protected -- underscores your concern. It also mirrors this government's commitment, stated in both our policy paper and in the throne speech, to protect and conserve Ontario's drinking water supplies and to allay public fears about water quality.

The people of Ontario are deeply concerned about the toxic abuse, in this chemical age, of our once pristine lakes and rivers. This growing anxiety has led residents to spend approximately \$100 million annually on bottled water and home water treatment devices.

Since 1985 the Ministry of the Environment has been monitoring drinking water supplies throughout Ontario under its Drinking Water Surveillance Program. We have just released the results for 1989.

According to the reports, based on water taken from 65 water supply systems throughout Ontario our drinking water is generally good. And with the exception of minor problems in four systems, which were remedied, all systems produced water in compliance with Ontario Drinking Water Objectives.

At the same time, however, there are municipal water supplies, private communal water systems and individual wells in the province which are not being regularly monitored. We are developing a new groundwater protection strategy to protect our groundwater from toxic chemicals and sewage pollution and to prevent the overconsumption of ground water supplies. We intend to expand the existing program, which identifies and remedies contaminated groundwater on a complaint-response basis only, to a systematic province-wide

program rooted in prevention.

Ontario's existing water quality legislation is, I am glad to say, directed primarily at the sources of pollution, not at the point of consumption. While we do have drinking water objectives, they are not enforceable. They are not mandatory and they haven't provided the public with enough information to make informed decisions about water safety. Thus, the reason why many people choose to pay for bottled water.

This lack of standards for drinking water has been the subject of criticism from environmental groups and the general public. In response to this, I am committed to the introduction of a Safe Drinking Water Act. Our government's first Speech from the Throne reaffirmed this commitment.

My staff have informed me of the detailed brief that you have already submitted to us. It covers many of the areas that we are considering. When the Act is finalized it will be stronger because of the input of organizations such as yours.

As with the Bill of Rights, I can't give you all the particulars of the new act at this point. However, I will say that it will set enforceable standards for maximum contaminant levels.

It will also include provisions to make the owners and operators of drinking water systems accountable for monitoring, assessing and reporting on water quality. In addition, it will provide penalties for inadequate performance and establish liabilities for any resulting damages.

I am confident that the Safe Water Drinking Act will ultimately inspire greater public confidence in the quality of our drinking water.

I am aware that some of the people here today represent municipalities facing substantial costs to maintain or renew their aging water supply and wastewater collection and treatment

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systems. You are being asked to set up programs to deal with toxic contaminants and heavy metals in drinking waters. And you must also finance new treatment systems to handle population growth and economic development.

The financial costs facing this province is in the order of billions of dollars over the next 10 or 15 years.

How do we achieve these environmental objectives while maintaining economic stability in this recessionary time?

We must look in several directions:

First, the ministry is assessing the funds required for rehabilitating the province's infrastructure as well as identifying the funding required to address the problems of combined sewer overflows and stormwater runoff.

Second, we are reviewing the mechanisms for funding enhanced water and sewage treatment.

In 1990, the previous government announced the formation of an Ontario water and sewer agency to formulate a new vision for the water industry of Ontario. Unfortunately, the initial terms were vague and evoked much criticism. When our government took office, the agency was put on hold until we could examine its purpose more closely. A report on the agency, its role, mandate and function, should be ready for discussion by Cabinet later this spring.

I am sure that Mr. James MacLaren, who was appointed chairman of the agency, and who will be your luncheon speaker, will have more to say on the future of these services.

Third, we are examining a full cost pricing policy for water use.

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Granted that 90 per cent of the water we use is returned to the rivers and lakes from which it came, but it is often contaminated in the process and must undergo extensive -- and expensive -- treatment before it again enters our homes.

Currently, on average only about 65 per cent of the costs of water and sewage services are covered by revenues. This has to change.

Requiring industries and households to pay a more equitable fee for their water may be an excellent means of reducing the demand on our infrastructure, and of promoting water use efficiency and conservation.

Conservation -- that is a key word today.

Just as over the past few months, my ministry has developed a new waste management strategy, placing emphasis on reduction, reuse and recycling, so we must develop a similar strategy for water use. We must protect and conserve our water resources. We must develop an effective teamwork and a partnership with all the people of Ontario. We must break away from the consumer lifestyle that typified the 1980s and develop a conserver society for the 90s.

We intend that the passage of the Safe Water Drinking Act will be a springboard for a wide-ranging public awareness campaign about the environmental and economic benefits of wise water use.

In addition to action programs such as the Environmental Bill of Rights and the Safe Drinking Water Act, my ministry also undertakes research into drinking water. Over the past 5 years, we have spent \$1.72 million on drinking water research under our Environmental Research Program. During the 1991-92 fiscal year, we are committed to spending at least \$1.44 million under the combined Environmental Research and the Environmental Technologies Programs.

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But I am concerned that drinking water research seems to have such a low priority with everyone, except in this Ministry. In the U.S. many universities are involved with research in this area, but we don't have enough of this type of interest in Canada.

In Ontario, we need to develop this further. I believe that more universities and consultants should be encouraged to look at innovative processes for the treatment of both water and wastewater.

To protect our drinking water, we must ensure that the contaminant tap is shut off from flowing into our lakes and rivers. Most of you, of course, are familiar with the Municipal Industrial Strategy for Abatement or MISA. For those of you who are not, it is a program to eliminate water pollution from industrial and municipal discharges. Monitoring regulations are now law for nine industrial sectors and limits regulations are being set.

For the kraft pulp and paper mills industry, the ministry didn't wait for the MISA limits regulations to become law but rather issued interim control orders last summer to reduce the persistent discharges of substances. This will lead to some real improvements. For example, Kimberly-Clark has spent \$25 million on a secondary treatment lagoon and has also made process changes to reduce the amount of toxic contaminants in its waste discharge.

While this, of course, is the kind of progress we are aiming for, more needs to be done in fostering process and product formulation changes that minimize or eliminate waste, because removing them by treatment at the end of the line has been problematic. Our long-term goal is, of course, zero discharge of the most persistent bio-accumulative substances.

Personally, I am not satisfied with the speed of MISA's progress in improving water quality, so I am working with ministry staff to strengthen the process.

To sum up, the government and the ministry share a common goal with your two organizations: to ensure that the public has safe drinking water now and in the future. We



must continue to work together in achieving this. Your contributions in the past have been greatly appreciated. Let us continue to be partners in finding common solutions to common problems.

I wish you the best for your conference. It was good to be here today.

Thank you.

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