

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

**STATEMENT OF G. TRACY MEHAN, III
NOMINATED TO BE
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR WATER
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
WASHINGTON, D.C.
JULY 25, 2001**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, for the privilege to address you as President Bush's nominee for the position of Assistant Administrator for Water at the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

I am very grateful to the President, Governor Whitman and this Committee for being considered for this tremendous responsibility to protect the waters of the United States. I look forward to working with you all to insure that our children continue to enjoy the fruits of America's bounty, most especially its lakes, rivers, wetlands and oceans.

I grew up on the Mississippi River and married a resident of the Lake Michigan shores. My wife and children, even as we speak, are enjoying a summer's respite on a lake in northern Wisconsin. My parents are on their way to the coast of South Carolina for a well-deserved vacation. For my family, as for most American families, water defines much of our lives, certainly the more enjoyable aspects. For many Americans, water is even more important -- it is the means by which they earn a living, support a business, or feed themselves.

Given the importance of water in the lives and occupations of our citizens, it is understandable that, starting in the 1970's the Nation began the work of restoring its water quality with such great, albeit incomplete, success. The strength of our economy in the postwar era, creating both the desire and the means of cleaning up our waters, had a lot to do with it. But it wasn't just the money. It was the love of our country and its beautiful waters.

Many commentators have noted the evolving nature of the challenges to further improvements in water quality. We need to look beyond the traditional discharge pipe to more generalized, diffuse runoff. There is also the need to look at the entire watershed to assess the most cost-effective means of reducing a target pollutant. These and other challenges, such as restoring contaminated sediments and preventing air deposition of pollutants to water, will require new and creative ways of meeting our responsibilities of stewardship.

I hope to contribute to the search for solutions to the water quality challenges of the day, working closely with the White House, Governor Whitman and this Committee to involve stakeholders from the public and private sectors, from state and local government, and from inside and outside of government.

Working together, I believe we can identify and implement successful strategies to maintain and restore the chemical, physical and biological integrity of our waters. No doubt, many of these strategies will be tailored to specific problems in specific communities. Hence, the importance of the watershed as a social and hydrological reality. Here is where communities, neighbor to neighbor, can engage, educate and persuade one another in a mutual quest for shared goals.

There are, of course, other problems, national in scope, where the federal role is a significant one. This Committee has developed legislation directing the Environmental Protection Agency to work with states, tribes and other federal agencies to help finance water infrastructure, to set national drinking water standards, to protect wetlands, to control discharges from industries and sewage treatment plants, and to reduce nonpoint pollution. The impact of air pollutants, such as mercury or nitrogen, on water quality also requires national attention. This is a classic, cross-media problem, and we will need a coordinated approach to addressing pollutants which are a threat to both air and water.

Americans view conservation and environmental protection as important elements of the public agenda. They look to public officials to harmonize these priorities with social and economic objectives. This is a task of great difficulty, but one well worth the effort.

I will strive to meet these challenges while relying on the best available science and economic analysis with due regard for the statutory directives of the Congress.

I would be honored to work with this Committee to accomplish the hard work of protecting and restoring our Nation's water quality. Thank you for your time and consideration.