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## **Nor any drop to drink**

Unless Pennsylvanians vote YES on next week's statewide ballot question, we could all wind up like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, with "Water, water, everywhere, / Nor any drop to drink."

Without a vote to approve the \$400 million bond to fund the Water and Sewer Systems Assistance Act, we will suffer from increased pollution in our local waterways, substandard drinking water and an increasingly dreary economy. We cannot let that happen.

Our 86,000 miles of streams and rivers are more than just beautiful – we overwhelmingly rely on local waterways for drinking water, with four out of five Pennsylvanians getting their drinking water from rivers and streams. Our local waterways provide economic and recreational opportunities, too. Six million Pennsylvanians enjoy the outdoors and fishing alone is a \$1 billion industry in the state.

Unfortunately, nearly 20 percent of our streams and rivers are polluted. The sources are many – nutrient pollution from outdated sewage treatment plants, sediment-laden agricultural runoff, industrial livestock operations, toxic industrial wastewater from manufacturing, raw sewage from overwhelmed & outdated sewer systems, and polluted runoff from poorly planned development.

We must fix our outdated wastewater and sewage treatment facilities, where significant improvements are long overdue. Sewage treatment plants in the Susquehanna River basin must install expensive new technology to cut down on nutrient pollution. In other areas, overloaded systems dump untreated wastewater into rivers & streams during heavy rain events. Excess nutrient pollution causes massive algae blooms in rivers and water bodies downstream. When the algae die and decompose, they consume the oxygen in the water creating dead zones that cannot support aquatic life.

A yes vote will help fight this pollution in our local waterways, and will help clean areas downstream, like the Chesapeake Bay, and the Ohio, Mississippi and Delaware rivers. Examples of the need for this funding can be seen throughout the Commonwealth:

- The Susquehanna River provides 50 percent of the freshwater to the Chesapeake Bay – our failure to prevent pollution upstream is harming the entire Bay. Thanks to state funding, both Virginia and Maryland facilities are making necessary upgrades, yet here in Pennsylvania, pollution reduction and water quality improvements have yet to be made. A yes vote on the ballot measure will reestablish Pennsylvania's commitment to clean water here and downstream.
- In Philadelphia, a 2006 poll found that one in five residents and one in three businesses suffered property damage due to flooding and sewage backups caused by an aging sewer system

inadequate to handle wastewater and stormwater loads. A yes vote can help Philadelphia replace and upgrade infrastructure and reduce runoff that pollutes local waterways.

- In western Pennsylvania, the sewage collection system is so old and fragile that as little as one-tenth of an inch of rain or melting snow can cause raw sewage to overflow into the rivers and streams. The problem is so bad that the Allegheny County Health Department has an orange flag alert system warning boaters and anglers when the water is contaminated with human waste and dangerous for recreation. An average season will have 11 alerts, lasting from one to 45 days.
- The City of Lebanon Authority needs to make \$50 million of improvements to its wastewater treatment plant. But without state funding to tap into, the cost of the improvements will double customer's sewer rates — about \$200 a year for a family of four in the next five years.

The problem is huge and the costs are astronomical – it could take billions to make all necessary maintenance and infrastructure improvements to our water and sewage facilities. And the longer upgrades are put off, the more expensive they become. Without a funding source for our municipal treatment plants, local families and businesses must carry the financial burden with escalating rates on their monthly bills.

Pennsylvania's cities and towns must stay affordable and attractive places to live and work. Passing the costs for failing infrastructure on to local communities could lead to an economic downturn, on top of the financial problems we are all already experiencing. Without a reliable source of clean water and a means to treat waste, new growth and economic development will stall.

The ballot question calls for \$400 million funded through the sale of state bonds to investors. Grants and low-interest loans would be available for new construction of and improvements to drinking water and wastewater facilities. This would significantly help our local communities make the necessary upgrades.

It is time for Pennsylvanians to voice their commitment to the rivers and streams where we swim, fish and paddle. Let's step up and say yes on November 4 to bring our sewer and water systems into the 21st Century. Say yes to keep pollutants out of our waterways. Say yes to healthy communities. Say yes to Pennsylvania staying an affordable and attractive place to live.

Or be prepared for the future: "Water, water, everywhere, / Nor any drop to drink."

Find out where to vote at <http://www.votespa.com/Wheretovote/tabid/72/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.  
To confirm that you are registered to vote, click on County Contacts and Websites on the left hand side of that page.

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