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## Nixon Statement on Veto of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972

To the Senate of the United States:

The pollution of our rivers, lakes and streams degrades the quality of American life. Cleaning up the Nation's waterways is a matter of urgent concern to me, as evidenced by the nearly tenfold increase in my budget for this purpose during the past four years.

I am also concerned, however, that we attack pollution in a way that does not ignore other very real threats to the quality of life, such as spiraling prices and increasingly onerous taxes. Legislation which would continue our efforts to raise water quality, but which would do so through extreme and needless overspending, does not serve the public interest. There is a much better way to get this job done.

For this reason, I am compelled to withhold my approval from S. 2770, the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972--a bill whose laudable intent is outweighed by its unconscionable \$24 billion price tag. My proposed legislation, as reflected in my budget, provided sufficient funds to fulfill that same intent in a fiscally responsible manner. Unfortunately the Congress ignored our other vital national concerns and broke the budget with this legislation.

Environmental protection has been one of my highest priorities as President. The record speaks for itself. With the Council on Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency, we have established a strong new framework for developing and administering forceful programs in this problem area. I have proposed more than 25 far-reaching laws to deal with threats to the environment; most still await final action in the Congress. Pending enactment of new legislation, our enforcement agencies have cracked down on polluters under old laws seldom enforced by previous administrations.

The budget authority which I have requested for pollution control and abatement in fiscal year 1973 is more than four times the amount requested in 1969. Federal grants for local sewage treatment plant construction have increased almost tenfold, from an annual rate of \$214 million appropriated up to the time I took office, to \$2 billion in my budget for 1973. This dramatic growth in the share of Federal Government resources being devoted to the environment exceeds, many times over, the rate of increase for funds in most other major government programs.

Every environmental spending increase that I have proposed, however, has been within the strict discipline of a responsible fiscal policy--a policy which recognizes as the highest national priority the need to protect the working men and women of America against tax increases and renewed inflation. Specifically, the water pollution control bill which I originally sent to the Congress last year was fully consistent with the concept of a

balanced, full-employment budget. It would have committed \$6 billion in Federal funds over a three-year period, enough to continue and accelerate the momentum toward that high standard of cleanliness which all of us want in America's waters.

By contrast, the bill which has now come to my desk would provide for the commitment of a staggering, budget wrecking \$24 billion. Every extra dollar which S. 2770 contemplates spending beyond the level of my budget proposals would exact a price from the consumer in the form of inflated living costs, or from the taxpayer in the form of a new Federal tax bite, or both.

Ironically, however, only a portion of the \$ 18 billion by which my bill was fattened on Capitol Hill would actually go to buy more pollution control than the Administration bill would have done. One backward-looking provision, for example, would provide \$750 million to reimburse State and local governments for work already completed on sewage treatment plants between 1956 and 1966. The precedent this would set for retroactive reimbursement in other matching grant programs is an invitation to fiscal chaos. Another provision would raise the Federal share of the cost of future facilities from 55 percent to 75 percent. Neither of these costly actions would, in any real sense, make our waters any cleaner: they would simply increase the burden on the Federal taxpayer.

There is a well-worn political axiom, which says that any election year spending bill, no matter how ill-advised, defies veto by the President. But I say that any spending bill this year which would lead to higher prices and higher taxes defies signature by this President. I have nailed my colors to the mast on this issue; the political winds can blow where they may.

I am prepared for the possibility that my action on this bill will be overridden. The defeat of my proposal for a spending ceiling showed that many Senators and Congressmen are simply AWOL in our fight against higher taxes. And some have been lured to the wrong side of the fight by the false glitter of public works money for their districts or states. They seem to forget that it is their constituents' pockets from which the higher taxes must come as a result of their votes this week. Others, to their great credit, voted for the spending limit to try to hold taxes down. Taxpayers must be sad to learn that a majority are charge account Congressmen.

If this veto is not sustained, however, let the issue be clearly drawn. As with the spending ceiling, so with this bill, a vote to sustain the veto is a vote against a tax increase. A vote to override the veto is a vote to increase the likelihood of higher taxes.

Even if this bill is rammed into law over the better judgment of the Executive--even if the Congress defaults its obligation to the taxpayers--I shall not default mine. Certain provisions of S. 2770 confer a measure of spending discretion and flexibility upon the President, and if forced to administer this legislation I mean to use those provisions to put the brakes on budget-wrecking expenditures as much as possible.

But the law would still exact an unfair and unnecessary price from the public. For I am convinced, on the basis of 26 years' experience with the political realities here in Washington, that the pressure for full funding under this bill would be so intense that funds approaching the maximum authorized amount could ultimately be claimed and paid out, no matter what technical controls the bill appears to grant the Executive.

I still hope, with millions of taxpayers, that at least one third plus one of the members in one House will be responsible enough to vote for the public interest and sustain this veto. It should be noted that doing so would by no means terminate the existing Federal water quality programs, because the Environmental Protection Agency will continue to operate those programs until the merits of a new water bill can be dealt with as a first order of business in the new Congress.

I look forward to cooperating with the next Congress on a prudent bill, to achieve ends on which we are mutually agreed, and by means which I trust will take better account than S. 2770 did of the working men and women who must ultimately pay the bill for environmental quality.

RICHARD NIXON  
The White House,  
October 17, 1972.

*Source:* Richard Nixon: "Veto of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972.," October 17, 1972. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3634>