

## **WATER PLANT NEARLY READY**

*Desalination project to come online in August; Congress debates more funds.*

**By Lisa Friedman**

**Washington Bureau – Long Beach Press-Telegram**

**Tuesday, May 24, 2005 - WASHINGTON** — A federally funded saltwater desalination project in Long Beach should start producing water this summer and important research findings by early as next year, a city official told Congress Tuesday.

The pilot plant, which uses a unique membrane technology known as the "Long Beach Method" to remove salt and other impurities from ocean water, will be online in August, said Long Beach Water Department General Manager Kevin Wattier.

About 18 months of research is expected to follow, to verify energy savings.

"A year from now we'll have a lot of results," Wattier said.

Congress has authorized up to \$20 million for the desalination plant at the Haynes Generation Station in Long Beach. Wattier said he believes that in the coming decade, desalination technology will be able to meet 10 percent of the city's water demands.

Wattier's testimony before the House Resources Committee panel on water and power came as Congress debated whether the federal government should help pay the costs of operating desalination facilities. Currently, the government funds research but does not subsidize electricity costs or other aspects of running desalination plants.

David Garman, assistant secretary for energy efficiency at the U.S. Department of Energy, said the Bush administration opposes legislation authorizing incentive payments to plants. The bill, sponsored by Reps. Jim Gibbons, R-Nev., and Jim Davis, D-Fla., would devote \$200 million for grant payments aimed at offsetting the cost of electric energy to operate the facilities.

"It would give great hope to those of us out West where water is short," Gibbons said, adding that the expensive means of extracting salt from ocean water "holds the promise of becoming a key component of a long-term solution to America's water crisis."

Garman said the administration strongly supports developing desalination technology. But, he said, funding the operating plants "is not a comprehensive approach to the challenge we face' and that funding research and development will have more long-lasting impacts.

Bernie Rhinerson, past chairman of the U.S. Desalination Coalition and a San Diego County Supervisor, said the government needs to do more.

"We need to begin to think beyond research," he said. "Water supply is something we need to start working on now because it takes time to build these plants."

Wattier said Long Beach has no position on the legislation. Officials say the legislation would provide funds for new facilities, but not for existing ones.

"We already have a federally authorized desalination facility in Long Beach. We don't have a strong interest in the legislation one way or another," Wattier said.

The city has already received \$4 million toward the program and expects to receive another \$4 million this year.

Nationwide, there are more than 1,000 desalination plants in operation. Over the years, costs have decreased dramatically from about \$2,000 per acre-foot of water in 1990 to about \$800 per acre-foot a decade later.

Still, desalinated water remains two to three times more expensive than other conventional water sources, officials said.