MISSION FOR AMERICA · CHAPTER 14 · AT A GLANCE

The National Mission to Upgrade America’s Water Systems

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The United States loses 6.75 billion gallons of treated drinking water every day, pipes water through lead lines into millions of homes, and leaves more than a million people without running water or basic plumbing. Climate change is making it worse, drawing down the rivers, reservoirs, and aquifers the country depends on. In the West, the Colorado River is promised to more users than it can supply, and in 2026, when the states that share it could not agree on new rules, the federal government imposed cuts that are already being fought in court. The Mission for Water has two jobs: to make every tap in America safe to drink from, and to make sure the country always has enough water to go around.

This mission will:

- Guarantee safe, affordable water in every home: every lead service line replaced by 2037, the PFAS limits reinstated by statute, and a permanent assistance program so no household loses water service over a bill it cannot pay.
- Bring running water and plumbing to every home that still lacks them, from the Navajo Nation to Appalachia to the Texas colonias.
- Stop the leaks that waste a fifth of the country's treated water, with a national water loss standard and cheap 30-year financing for the pipe replacement that utilities have deferred for decades.
- Catch the rain: pay farmers to bank wet-year floodwater underground in the nation's aquifers as insurance against drought, while repairing the aging dams and levees that protect communities from floods.
- Recycle wastewater into new supply, build clean-energy desalination on the coasts, and require new data centers and factories to cool with recycled water wherever it is available, so they stop competing with families for drinking water.
- Build water markets in the over-promised Western basins, starting with the Colorado River: each river capped at what it actually carries, its water divided into shares that farms and cities can buy, sell, and lease, every large diversion and well metered and policed by an independent basin authority, disputes settled at the table, and willing farmers paid to free up what cities, rivers, and tribes need.

The country has 50,000 separate water systems, each with its own budget and backlog, most too small to finance major repairs on their own. As with the other missions, the Mission will set national standards and give utilities generous support to meet them. The systems will stay locally run wherever they can manage it, but each will be held to one National Water Standard for leaks, contaminants, and reuse, with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation providing the long-term, low-cost financing to get there. Alongside the standards comes a wave of new water infrastructure: new pipes, treatment that strips out the poisons, repaired dams and levees, stormwater capture, aquifer recharge, and recycling plants. Every piece is already working somewhere in America: Los Angeles catches its storms, Arizona banks its river water, Orange County turns wastewater back into drinking water.

The 10-year build runs on the order of $1.1 trillion, and roughly three-fifths of it is lending that repays itself from ordinary water bills over the life of the pipes and plants. It will create hundreds of thousands of jobs, give rural communities new income from hosting water storage on their land, and end the quiet emergency of unsafe taps in the wealthiest country on earth. Every year the country waits, the pipes get older, the aquifers drop further, and the repair bill grows.