

Unquenchable

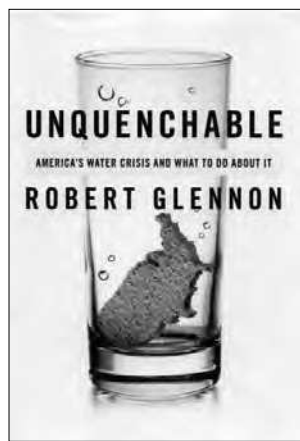
Book tackles the tragedy of the water commons

Editor's Note: David Moon, Eugene water lawyer and editor of The Water Report newsletter, alerted EW to an important new book.

Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What To Do About It was written by Robert Glennon, the Morris K. Udall professor of law and public policy at the University of Arizona.

Moon said, "Unquenchable provides an extremely valuable overview of the myriad water problems facing the U.S. and also gives us Glennon's blueprint for change."

Below are edited excerpts from Moon's interview with Glennon in the June issue of The Water Report (www.thewaterreport.com).



"People in the country at large are absolutely clueless that the U.S. is facing a water crisis," Robert Glennon said. "The reason for this is two-fold. First, we have assumed that water is like air – limitless and inexhaustible – when in fact it is finite and very exhaustible. Second, water managers in the U.S. have done a heck of a fine job – they continue to provide to consumers high quality, clean water for a pittance.... What's the problem when I wake up in the morning and turn on the tap and get good quality water – how can there be a water problem? Only if you start to go down the path of mandatory water rationing, bans on water uses, do people start to think, 'This is affecting me personally.'"

"Water lubricates the American economy, just like oil does," Glennon said. "It is perceived as an environmental issue. I would like to reorient it so that people perceive water as an economic issue."

America's blissful ignorance of the value of water is best illustrated by two water uses highlighted by Glennon: lawns and bottled water. "We spend \$40 billion each year and consume 270 billion gallons of water each week in order to maintain more than 23 million acres of lawn." Another example of the disconnect involves the recent ethanol boom and the failure of the debate over ethanol's energy value to acknowledge another variable: water. Glennon points out that ethanol plants consume more than four gallons of water for every gallon of ethanol produced – and that doesn't include the water required to grow the corn!

He has a chapter called "Shall We Drink Pee" explaining, "Wastewater turns out to have so many valuable uses that we've given it a new name, reclaimed or recycled water. He discusses this "viable way to expand our supply with its inherent advantage of being a renewable supply that literally increases as the population increases."

In a chapter called "The Enigma of the Water Closet," Glennon says that Americans waste vast quantities of water to dispose of human waste on the one hand and also treat all of our water to potable standards that is sent to residences and businesses. Thus, as our country looks to deal with its aging infrastructure, "It makes no sense to simply rebuild the existing wastewater infrastructure."

"I think what I'd like to link the toilet issue to, and the problem of treating all of our water to potable standards, is the intimate connection between water and energy," Glennon said. "That is one of the newsworthy themes of the book – U.S. energy policy has almost totally ignored the water aspects of power generation."

"What the U.S. really has not done and must do is to use price signals and market forces to encourage conservation to facilitate the reallocation of water from low-value uses to high-value uses," Glennon said.

He would raise the price of water so that it is closer to its true value to "encourage water conservation through price signals that create financial incentives to conserve." He also asserts that "water is an inalienable political and social right and that each person should be guaranteed a 'water lifeline.'"

Glennon advocates for groundwater reform in *Unquenchable*. His simplified version of our water system envisions it as a "giant milkshake" with each well or diversion being another straw in the glass. "What we have done in the past is allow an unlimited amount of straws in the same glass. That's a recipe for disaster and epitomizes the 'tragedy of the commons.' What we need to do is to say to anyone – whether it is a commercial developer or an apartment complex or Google or Intel – if you want to put a new demand on the common supply, if you want to insert a new straw in the glass, then you need to persuade someone else to make do with less. You need to persuade someone else to cancel their use or remove their straw from the glass."

When asked what he sees as the biggest hurdles to implementing his solutions, Glennon stressed awareness and apathy.

"Will the political will be there? Well, it might be there for the big picture, that is, if you were to take a popular vote," Glennon said. "But what happens when you have a state that's generally dependent on groundwater use? You've got a constituency there for not only using the water but also abusing water use."

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BITING BACK

I went to Cozmic Pizza Saturday afternoon to hear *L.A. Times* editor Dean Kuipers promote his book, *Operation Bite Back: Rod Coronado's War to Save American Wilderness*. Only a few attended because many folks were out at the Oregon Country Fair.

Kuipers' talk was informative and interesting. He read one passage out of *Operation Bite Back*, and I felt extreme sadness and anger toward the mink "farmer" and the entire animal exploitation industry. Cheers for Rod Coronado and others who are committed to effective activism.

Coronado is currently on probation after serving time for his brave activism, among other things. Most recently, he was imprisoned for exercising his constitutional right to freedom of speech when he responded to an audience member's question. The question related to how he'd constructed a non-explosive incendiary device out of a plastic jug filled with gas to commit a past arson, for which he had long since been sentenced and done his time.

Coronado's terms of probation are equal to being under house arrest, with heavy restrictions, including the requirement to notify the appropriate "authority" in order to leave home, unless going to his workplace for his shift. He is not allowed to use a computer unless it's equipped with a federal monitoring device.

For those who missed this presentation, visit www.deankuiperonline.com for more information about Kuipers and his books. To help fight the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), see www.cldc.org

Sherry Franzen
Eugene

liberty and having the freedom to choose our own way to live.

Mandatory health insurance will benefit only the private insurance companies. I understand mandatory auto insurance, the option being only if you own an auto.

If insurance companies have their way the law will be this: If you have a body, you will have to pay a monthly premium for it. How's this sound?

Email your congressmen now!

Possible alternatives include socialized medicine. This system of medicine works very well, and private interest companies influence all the negative press. Yes, the free press isn't free. Only in the press does socialized medicine look like a bad way to provide coverage. The reality, however, is that it works very well and is a hundred times more efficient than private company coverage and less expensive. The private companies would lose millions with socialized medicine in place, and this is why there is all of the negative press about socialized medicine.

More proof of the efficiencies of socialized medicine is Medicare. Sure, it isn't perfect, but compared to private company coverage, it is light years ahead in how it works and cost.

This is your country. If insurance companies get there way, the words "your choice" won't be your option.

Your freedom is up to you to nurture. Do it for YOU or me or anyone. Just do it! Write, email, walk, run and get involved in your medical future now, please, for all of us!

"Yon" Jan Gardner
Eugene

DIAPER TRIPPING

After reading Eve Cienfuegos' letter last week about how much she hates the Oregon Country Fair, I had two thoughts. Why does *EW* print these kind of letters? And Eve, I think the only diaper you're tripping on is your own.

Scott Kirkpatrick
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