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O'Toole, Pou Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Protect 800,000 Ratepayers From Ill-Conceived PVWC Reservoir Project

Senators demand that local government officials and taxpayers have a voice on project, which could cost upwards of \$150 Million

TRENTON - Senator Kevin O'Toole (R-40) and Senator Nellie Pou (D-35) have introduced bipartisan legislation that requires the Passaic Valley Water Commission (PVWC) to obtain approval from owner- municipalities and other municipalities serviced by the Commission before entering into a contract to cap, enclose, or drain an open-air reservoir.

This legislation (S2526) is in response to the PVWC's plan to drain three open-air reservoirs on Garrett Mountain in Passaic County and replace them with concrete tanks. It has advanced over seven years without public input or public information. The proposal, which would affect more than 800,000 ratepayers in the owner municipalities and in the region, could cost upwards of \$150 million. The owner municipalities are Paterson, Clifton and Passaic.

"No one wants to stand in the way of clean drinking water. However, we will not allow the fiber of our communities to be transformed without their input. Decisions like this can not be made with little or no public input," said Senator Kevin O'Toole R-Bergen, Essex, Morris, and Passaic. "Our residents have a right to be heard on what they think is best for their community and this legislation does just that. It's time for everyone to get around a table and reach a solution that not only protects our drinking water but our communities as well."

"This project would have a profound impact on our communities and would be paid for by ratepayers, yet neither the public nor local officials have been consulted. The commission's lack of transparency and its failure to engage the public and local stakeholders is unacceptable," said Senator Nellie Pou, D-Passaic and Bergen. "This legislation would ensure that local officials and the public have a voice in whether the proposed reservoir project, or any subsequent plan, moves forward. This is the right thing to do for those living in the towns and cities that will be affected and for the region at large."

The PVWC plan would drain three reservoirs - Stanley M. Levine, New Street and Great Notch – and replace them with concrete tanks in order to comply with a US Environmental Protection Agency mandate to cover all treated drinking water supplies. The EPA, however, is revisiting the requirement as a result of lawsuits filed by New York City and Portland, Oregon and will not issue revised requirements until 2016.

"It's almost unimaginable to drain a reservoir that is a contributing asset to our Great Falls Historic District and adjacent to our nation's newest National Park," said Paterson Mayor Jose "Joey" Torres. "There must be a better plan that protects our historic and natural resources and our ratepayers' wallets. I want to thank Senators Pou and O'Toole for this legislation, which will stop the PVWC and ensure public participation."

"We will NOT allow the PVWC to drain two beautiful reservoirs in Woodland Park and replace them with concrete monstrosities," said Woodland Park Mayor Keith Kazmark. "Woodland Park has led this fight with the PVWC and we will do whatever it takes to protect our residents from this ridiculous and costly plan. I want to applaud both Senator Kevin O'Toole and Senator Nellie Pou for introducing this bipartisan legislation that protects municipalities and ratepayers from an independent commission --- that currently has no proper oversight."

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