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## President Jimmy Carter to "Members of Congress,' 16 March 1977

Jimmy Carter

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 16, 1977

TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

I have heard from many members of Congress about my decision to review water projects and to delete funding for some of them. I want you to know that I am aware of your concerns and I sympathize with them.

It is essential to involve the Congress in developing a coherent water resource policy, which we have not had in the past. Toward this end I will arrange a meeting with Congressional leaders from all relevant committees to meet personally with me in order to establish a dialogue and close cooperation on this issue. In the future, when the time constraints are not as severe as those I faced in preparing revisions to the FY 1978 budget, any project to be recommended for deletion will be discussed with the members of Congress in whose areas those projects are located.

Many of the country's water projects were authorized quite some time ago, when economic conditions and environmental concerns were different. The fact that many of these water resource projects present economic, environmental or safety problems today is no reflection on the Congress, the Corps of Engineers or the Department of Interior, because different criteria were used at the time these projects were initially authorized. Some have asked me to accept, in full, judgments made long ago on these projects and not to re-evaluate them at all in light of present, changed circumstances. But enormous sums of money, as well as major environmental and safety matters, are involved. I cannot meet my commitment to balance the budget unless the Congress and I can cooperate in reducing unnecessary spending. Every ongoing program in the government must be continually examined in the light of the harsh realities of a tight budget.

I approached my decision to delete funding on certain water projects, to review all current projects, and to develop permanent, rational criteria for future projects, out of a commitment to fiscal responsibility, environmental quality and human safety. You may be assured that my decision was not arbitrary and that no arbitrary decisions will be made in the future. Projects will be assessed on an individual basis, based upon criteria developed in close consultation with Congress.

The review process which we have begun will be objective, complete and fair. We will be holding hearings on projects which pose severe economic, environmental or safety questions prior to the time that I make my final recommendations to the Congress.

The criteria by which ongoing projects will be judged cannot be as strict as the criteria which will be applied to projects which will be authorized in the future. With ongoing projects we will consider such factors as the degree of project completion, local investments, potential dislocations and other factors.

Of the over 325 ongoing projects of the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, our initial screening criteria indicate that the vast majority of these projects will be completed as planned. Announcements of the results of this initial screening will be made within the next few days. Exaggerations of the number of projects to be deleted have been caused by the circulation and misunderstanding of various lists which I had never seen and which had no official sanction.

The 19 projects I deleted from the FY 1978 budget posed problems too severe to ignore. Examples of some of these problems illustrate the concerns which lead to my decision:

-- One project would be built in an earthquake zone, potentially jeopardizing the lives of thousands of people.

-- One project appeared to be in violation of an international treaty, and Canada has repeatedly asked the United States to suspend construction.

-- One project would have resulted in a federal investment of \$1.4 million for each individual landowner benefitting from the project, and only about 60 landowners would be benefitted.

-- Some projects would have inundated large amounts of productive farms and forests without counting these losses as project costs and providing questionable flood control, recreation and other benefits.

-- One project would have destroyed significant and heavily used natural recreation areas to create unneeded lakes for flatwater recreation already abundantly provided.

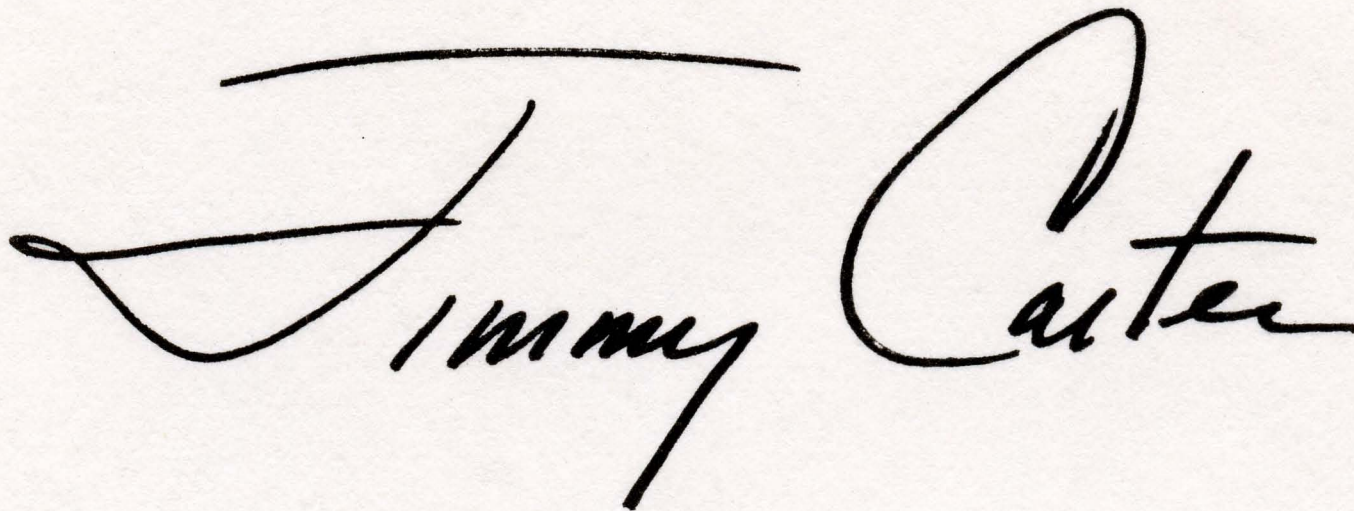
-- One project would have widened a waterway at taxpayer expense for the benefit of a very few private companies.

-- Several projects would have worsened the water shortages and salinity concentrations in the Colorado River, causing increased problems for downstream users, expensive remedial desalting costs, and jeopardizing our water agreements and treaties with Mexico.

-- Several projects had costs exceeding benefits, even at their low authorized discount rates and even if questionable benefits were not examined.

In cooperation with Congress I want to insure that our future water resource policies meet the real needs of this nation. I look forward to working with you in that enterprise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jimmy Carter". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.