

President Bernie Machen  
Welcome Remarks/UF Water Institute Symposium  
8:30 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 27  
Hilton University of Florida Conference Center

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Thank you, Wendy. Good morning and welcome!

For most of our history, we have taken water for granted, at least here on the East Coast.

We have dumped prodigious amounts on our lawns and golf courses. We have allowed farmers and industry virtually unfettered access to our aquifers, lakes and rivers. We have drilled, piped or pumped to accommodate every new subdivision or housing development.

Water may be essential to life, but we are accustomed to abundance, and we continue to pay a pittance for it – unless it arrives in a clear plastic bottle.

This tradition is passing. With much of the country including large swaths of the East Coast in a historic drought, residents and policy makers are paying more attention to water than they have in years, if ever.

That is why your work here at the University of Florida Water Institute's first major conference is so timely and important.

As water scholars, environmentalists, utility managers, climatologists and engineers, you make it your business to think about water every day. What has changed now, it seems to me, is that people are alive to the issues, and eager for your leadership. You have a historic opportunity to influence our laws, regulations and customs with the best interests of our most precious resource at heart.

University of Florida faculty conceived the interdisciplinary Water Institute to bring to bear the university's myriad research strengths on discovering solutions to the complex and difficult issues surrounding water. I hope this conference encourages that process, not just among the academics present, but with our many outside participants as well.

UF experts in the 1970s had a great deal to do with the creation of Florida's system of water management districts, today seen as a model for government stewardship of public water resources. I believe the time is ripe for this institution to join with public policy makers and private industry to make similar contributions again.

Rachel Carson wrote, "In an age when man has forgotten his origins and is blind even to his most essential needs for survival, water along with other resources has become the victim of his indifference."

With lake levels at or near historic lows from Lake Powell to Lake Lanier to Lake Okeechobee; with residents from West Palm Beach to Atlanta to Raleigh coping with water restrictions; with crops across much of the county's southern plains stunted for lack of rain, I think we are shedding our indifference – for the moment anyway.

You couldn't be here at the Water Institute at a better time. I urge all of you to take advantage of this reawakening to lead us in protecting and conserving this life-giving resource for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you.