**Retirement Speech for Gary, Allan, Hugh, Brent and Roy**

We'd like to thank you all for coming this afternoon, we're all very proud to have such a huge turnout. Or at least four of us are proud of being smart enough to invite Gary so that somebody would come to our retirements.

Today would of course be the day that we can at long last vent about everything and everybody who ever got on our bad side, every dumb idea and program, every goofy reorg. But then it occurred to us that those downtown towers behind us are simply packed with stupidity, craziness, malfeasance and toxic bosses – but we don't go bursting into *their* workplaces and telling them off, because we don't work there. Well, we don't work here anymore, either, so you'll just have to sort out all that nonsense on your own, like we did. Besides, we want to leave before midnight.

I've been deputized to give the one speech for us all, because we banded together for one party to minimize the long speeches, about us or from us – there's no way for anybody to summarize 170 staff-years of work, or for us to thank 170 staff-years worth of mentors, friends and colleagues, not in detail. They know who they are, and how we feel. Your co-workers and supervisors are already aware of our respect. So just once: thank you. Thank you all. You know how we feel.

There are just three things that we'll miss, and only one of them very badly.

First, even after all this time, we'll miss the work. Yes, it's time to move on, while we all still have time to learn and enjoy other things in life, too. But a trade and a skill is a true joy that gets deeper and richer as life goes on, if you keep putting more in to it. There are few satisfactions to compare to being able to do something valuable and important, and know it's been done well. We urge you all to keep improving at your profession, whether others reward you for it or not; the pride of great competence will be reward enough. But there's great pleasure, too, in being good at many things, so we'll be able to live with our loss of one vocation by pursuing other interests.

Secondly, we'll miss you. That loss does not have to be bad, either, because there's no reason for this to end any relationships; it's a matter of staying in touch. With work, you get automatic partnership with good people because you all have to show up and work together every day. Frequently, without that, relationships do fall apart, it takes effort to keep them up. We'll certainly miss having shared problems to solve and projects to pursue; we'll miss the ideas shooting back and forth across the table or the job site as smart minds bounce off each other. Please never fail to stop a moment every day and notice that your job contains those good times, too: those moments when the solution comes clear and everybody starts nodding in agreement that you've got it. They should be as treasured as that family moment when supper hits the table. We’ll all miss those moments. But we're the ones with the free time now, and it's on us to stay in touch. Expect our calls, because we're going to miss you often.

And third...that one is the worst of all. We won't just miss the work, we'll miss the pride of being part of this very, very important calling.

Many of you are fairly new here, and perhaps haven't been here as long as we were when the full meaning of this place slowly sank in for us. With all of us, and with nearly every new employee, it's just a job at first. You show up, do what's needed, collect a paycheque, nothing more to it.

Then we learned the numbers, the horrifying numbers that make “Saw” movies look like “Care Bears”. People in development work talk those numbers all the time, but almost nobody in the water industry of the already-developed world mentions the numbers, because it sounds like we're bragging, and scaremongering, and fishing for budgets. So we don't even mention it. We're so modest and quiet about our real accomplishments that some of our own employees don't know what they're *really, really* doing here. We mention it obliquely in the mission statement – a bland little “protect the public health” phrase shows up a few sentences in – but for people in our country, that doesn't have the overwhelming meaning that it has in places where we are not.

In those places, nine thousand people died yesterday for lack of what we do. Most of them were little kids, because the immune system doesn't mature until the age of five. Nine thousand died the day before, and nine thousand the day before that. The United Nations health organization has certified that waterborne illness is the greatest enemy that the human race has. It kills more people than AIDS, more people than malaria, more people than war. And they die in ways even worse than war; I won't trouble your dreams with descriptions of those diseases, but they die slowly and they die horribly, and they die pathetically; but they do NOT die...here.

They don't die in Calgary, or any place where we and our working brothers and sisters across the globe ply our trade. They die only among the billion-plus people that lack clean water, the 2.4 billion that lack sanitation. A conservative estimate of their death rate allows us to imagine what Calgary would lose if it had their problems: way over two thousand lives per year. It's proportional to population, but so is our staff level, roughly, so it has always been true that the now-1300 employees of Water Services can, in a purely statistical and notional sense, celebrate New Year’s Eve with the thought that they didn't just make a living that year: they saved two lives. We all save two lives for each of us, every year.

For 170 years, 340 lives. We can’t explain how that feels; we can only urge you to stick around and find out.

We spend no time on that thought, obviously; it's too big, and too self-regarding. We put all our thought into doing that job faster, with less money. We mostly work to provide more added-in services like protecting the environment, and avoiding traffic disruption, and supporting development before it happens...and all that. But we can focus on those things only because we're so very good at saving over two thousand lives per year that our core function is almost automatic, taken for granted, invisible.

*Invisible.* We are the silent service. Water services are accorded fully half the credit for the extension of average human lifespan in the last century, from about 40 years to 80. All the doctors and nurses, all their vaccines, and all the police and fire heroics put together have at most just matched what we do, without us mentioning it. There are a dozen fireman movies and two dozen doctor shows, and a hundred cop series, and sure, they are all very heroic, and deserve all that attention. But there are no engineer shows, and no sewer maintenance movies. I've never met a colleague who could care less. We are not here for the applause.

We're here because people count on us, whether they know it or not. Water services make cities themselves possible at all, civilization possible at all. And that's what we'll miss most of all: the privilege of serving that vital public trust. We are job creators today: we're opening five job positions and offering five people that privilege of serving that public trust. We hope they appreciate the gift as deeply as we have. We hope you all do.

We go now, to join those who are counting on you. As our first thing to say from the outside:

Thank you for your service; it has been our honour to labour at your side.