

WaterFix: It is time to start moving dirt and stop throwing mud by **Brett R. Barbre**



Just as Governor Brown's second, eight-year stay in the Governor's Mansion comes to a close, the window also may be rapidly closing on the California WaterFix. A remedy to the State's most vulnerable and valuable asset - and the pièce de résistance his father left us, the State Water Project.

In spite of Governor Pat Brown's best efforts to quench the State's thirst, the State Water Project was never completed. So, the problem remains: most of the rain and snow falls in Northern California, but most of the people live here in Southern California. That's why, the WaterFix must be built. It's long overdue.

When voters approved bonds for the State Water Project in 1960, the money was intended for related future projects - like the WaterFix. Since then, the State's population has more than doubled in 20 years. Today, we are 40 million strong and still growing.

Opponents of the WaterFix, which would build twin tunnels below the California Delta to bring water south, see the project as a pathway to more growth. Rather than put up a no vacancy sign, they are trying to control where and how we live by stifling investments in critical infrastructure that could keep the water flowing for the next century and beyond. They are hoping to use environmental regulations, such as the California Environmental Quality Act, to prevent construction, or delay it to the point of extinction.

Another argument from the no vacancy brigade is that the WaterFix will raise taxes. Wrong. Just like the State Water Project, the WaterFix will be paid for by revenue bonds, which are not paid back with tax dollars. That means those who benefit from the project - all water users - will pay through their water bills.

Truth be told, not building the WaterFix will surely raise your water bills. As periods of drought inevitably return, Sacramento will push the water-rationing button once again. And, in the face of mandatory conservation, water providers will be forced to raise their rates, meaning higher bills regardless of how much water you use.

Another bogus claim is that if the bonds can't be paid off, the taxpayers will be left with the bill. Nowhere in the history of Metropolitan Water District of Southern California have we defaulted on any of the major investments that deliver water to the fifth largest economy in the world.



Anyone who knows me knows that Governor Jerry Brown's positions seldom overlap with mine. However, a stopped clock is right twice a day and Governor Brown is right on the WaterFix. Like me, he remembers the great construction projects of the 1960s, first under his father, then under Governor Ronald Reagan. California's Golden Age. Back when California did big projects almost seamlessly, building infrastructure – roads, schools, universities, water projects – that everybody needed. Well, that bipartisan "can do" spirit is needed again.

We are one earthquake, one catastrophic event away from cutting off that precious supply of water to our homes, to our businesses, to the breadbasket of the world. The cost of doing nothing is too great. The time is now. As his father Pat said, "It is time to start moving dirt and stop throwing mud."

Brett R. Barbre is a member of the board of directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and is president of the board at the Municipal Water District of Orange County