

Opinion: No bond doesn't mean water issues are being addressed

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So much for the Safe, Clean and Reliable Drinking Water Supply Act of 2012. Earlier this month, lawmakers pulled the \$11-billion bond measure off the Nov. 6 ballot because the time wasn't right, which is another way of saying there was no way voters were going to approve a multibillion-dollar bond this year, and in the course of defeating it they were more likely to prowl for other tax or spending measures to reject, like the temporary sales and income tax increases on which Gov. Jerry Brown and Democrats in the Legislature are counting to make this year's budget work.

If the bond sounded familiar, it's because you may remember it as the Safe, Clean and Reliable Drinking Water Supply Act of 2010. The time wasn't right two years ago either, and after leading a painstaking effort to negotiate among numerous parties and interests to reach a carefully balanced water deal, then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger realized there was no way voters were going to approve a bond in the midst of the mortgage and budget meltdowns.

At the time the 2010 version got bounced from the ballot, the *Times* had not yet weighed in on the measure, also known as Proposition 18. Parts of the bond raised serious concern. The price tag was steep, especially in a state that has borrowed so much and pushed the boundaries of sound bonding policy. Why \$11 billion? In part because it was fat with earmarks.

Still, it was disappointing to not be able to finally assess the measure and allow voters to accept or reject it, because

it was the result of a concord brokered a year earlier among environmentalists, agribusiness factions, the Bay Area, Southern California and others, not exactly to break the state's three-decade deadlock over water but to at least agree on a new framework that might allow us to move forward. The bond was integral to a deal that included the "co-equal goals" of preserving a reliable water supply and repairing the ecosystem of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. The bond, or at least the agreement that undergirded it, could have provided a measure of good faith and momentum to the rest of the process. As it is, with the bond dropped in 2010 – and now dropped again – it must work the other way around if it is to work at all. The rest of the process may have to provide momentum for a bond two years from now.

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