

Opinion: Calif. water bond makes sense

By John Garamendi

Everyone agrees that California's aging water infrastructure is insufficient for our present and future needs.

When the Legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown negotiated the final language of the water bond, we monitored their work with trepidation. Had the proposed \$25 billion twin-tunnels boondoggle been included, it would have divided our state and doomed the bond.



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Fortunately, our state lawmakers pursued a more unifying approach and put Proposition 1 on the November ballot. It's a \$7.5 billion water bond that makes most of the right investments while remaining neutral on the twin tunnels.

The twin tunnels – three times the price tag of the entire bond – don't create 1 gallon of new water and, if ever built, would create the mechanism that could destroy the largest and most important estuary on the West Coast.

Fortunately, the water bond does create new water and includes many of the priorities found in my Water Plan for All California, which is focused on six priorities:

- New surface and underground water storage

- infrastructure;
- Water conservation;
- Water recycling;
- Levee improvements and habitat restoration;
- A science-driven process; and
- The protection of existing water rights.

California needs to develop surface and underground water storage systems. The off-stream Sites Reservoir, north of Sacramento in Colusa County, is a key cornerstone for this. It has the capacity to store 1.9 million acre-feet of water and provide up to 700,000 acre-feet of water for use each year. That's why Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., and I have introduced legislation that would help Sites clear federal hurdles.

Sites is just the beginning. Los Vaqueros reservoir in Contra Costa County should be expanded. The San Louis dam should be repaired and expanded. New reservoirs could be built at Los Banos Grandes and other off-stream sites throughout the Central Valley.

The over-drafting of the critical underground aquifers of the Central Valley must stop. Any water plan must include infrastructure and regulations necessary to protect and replenish these critical water reservoirs.

The quickest and cheapest new water source is conservation. Robust conservation efforts in urban water use could save 1 million acre-feet of water each year. California's \$40 billion agricultural economy needs a sustainable water supply. The technology already exists to expand on existing water conservation practices and conserve an additional 3 million acre-feet of water each year. This new water would play a crucial role in meeting the needs of our valuable agricultural industry.

Every year, 3.5 million acre-feet of treated water is dumped into the Pacific Ocean by cities in the Los Angeles Basin. How

foolish to pump water 500 miles, clean it, use it once, clean it to a higher standard than the day it arrives, and then dump it into the ocean. One million acre-feet could be recycled and stored in the underground aquifers in Southern California. Similar projects must be done in Northern California. Desalination of ocean water also can add to our supplies.

With adequate investment and implementation, urban and agriculture conservation, recycling programs and new storage could create approximately 5.7 million acre-feet of new water to use each year.

Any plan that doesn't include levee improvements in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is a plan awaiting disaster. Even the twin-tunnels plan relies on the delta levees to channel water to the great pumps at Tracy. Fortunately, the water bond, Prop. 1, provides money to maintain the critical levees protecting delta communities, agricultural land and water supply.

Providing a foundation for these projects is the protection of existing water rights. If we are going to build any project, these rights must be honored.

Taken together, a Water Plan for All California could create up to 5.7 million acre-feet at about half the cost of the twin-tunnels boondoggle. We would avoid the gridlock of a fruitless, time-consuming water war and meet the challenge of supplying our entire state with the water it needs.

Prop. 1 isn't the complete solution, but it's a necessary and important first step. We should vote for Prop. 1 and proceed with a Water Plan for All California

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