

# Delay water bond, but don't rewrite it

Lester Snow, Sacramento Bee, 7-20-10

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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg have asked the Legislature to move California's water bond, Proposition 18, from the November 2010 ballot to the November 2012 ballot.

This move was a matter of setting near-term legislative priorities and ensuring that California's budget and economic recovery are first and foremost on the decision-making agenda. It was a tough decision, but it is the right thing to do.

While there has been strong support for delaying the water bond until 2012, The Bee and a few others have taken the opportunity to pick apart the bond and suggest that it is filled with funding for unnecessary projects.

This water bond, which was in fact largely developed over a three-year period, not in the fleeting moments of a legislative special session, represents a comprehensive and deliberate approach to water resource management. This bond includes cost-share funding for a range of water projects: conservation, waste water recycling, habitat investments, floodplain restoration, water storage, desalination projects, watershed protection projects and more.

Contrary to articles in The Bee (Dan Walters, "Water bond in trouble – what now?" on July 5; editorial, "Pricey water bond deserves a revamp" on July 8), no public money will be spent on any storage projects until those who would receive water-supply benefits, such as local districts that deliver water to farms, businesses and citizens, agree to pay their share of the costs. Because of this "beneficiary pays" framework throughout the bond, the state's \$11 billion bond investment is expected to leverage approximately \$35 billion in additional investment, a 3-to-1 ratio. Without a state cost-share, many of these local projects are at risk.

It would be difficult to find anyone who lives in California who is not aware that we are in a persistent water crisis. Time and again state leaders have acknowledged that the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is broken, and we need a comprehensive solution to restore it to health, sustain that health and develop a modern, reliable water system. This cannot be done without a comprehensive approach ranging from habitat restoration to strategies that store water in wet years.

The water bond, as written, is a critical element of this comprehensive solution, not only for the Delta but also statewide water resource issues. It is as shortsighted as it is absurd to suggest that Klamath River restoration, the largest salmon restoration project on the West Coast, or California's share of a greater funding strategy to implement a bold plan to protect the Lake Tahoe basin are unnecessary investments, or worse yet should be characterized as earmarks.

For far too long our water management predicament has been that we tend to treat the symptoms of our water crisis in piecemeal fashion or with a reactive approach, all the while doing little or nothing to treat the underlying problem. This approach has not worked and will continue to compound the problems we currently experience.

We must make an investment in the future of California's natural resources. The California water bond, developed and supported by both Republicans and Democrats, is a comprehensive, cost-sharing approach to

dealing with the causes and not just the symptoms of our water crisis. The bond provides an investment to move forward without repeating shortsighted mistakes of the past.

Finally, the water bond must be moved to 2012 in its current form. To open it up for "revision" invites a restart and more time wasted on negotiating for what would inevitably return to the same basic conclusion: the comprehensive array of projects and categories of funding are significant and worthy of public investment. We must invest in improvements to avoid the high price of disaster response.