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OP-ED SUBMISSION

Valley Legislators Unite for Water Bond

A very rare political happening took place July 5 in Sacramento. Legislative Republicans and Democrats came together and produced a two-thirds vote to move the proposed comprehensive infrastructure water bond from this November to the November 2014 election.

Why was this necessary? For bond proponents, the answer was simple — to live to fight another day. This water bond is way too important for California and our children's future to have it fail this year because of the recession and state budget crisis. Valley legislators led the way to make sure hopes for eventual success of the bond would remain alive through overwhelming passage of Assembly Bill 1422 authored by Assembly Member Henry T. Perea (D-Fresno) and co-authored by Assembly Minority Leader Connie Conway (R-Tulare).

Ever since a remarkable bi-partisan effort in 2009 led to its enactment, the bond originally set to go before voters in November 2010 has been under attack for a variety of creative reasons. Some say it's too big. Others contend that it includes too much pork.

The truth is that large-scale water projects, while absolutely necessary to sustain a growing population, are expensive. Few have been built since Governor Edmond G. Brown successfully promoted the State Water Project.

California is a big and diverse state. Every region has its own particular water project needs. By the time you add it all up, the price tag is of necessity going to be expensive. To make significant cuts in what such a water bond would fund, as some have proposed, would result in having to make unappealing choices and decisions on what California region is not important enough to have a safe and reliable water supply.

Creating such a situation would be foolish. All Californians, and the regions in which they live and work, are important. Just imagine if California had not invested decades ago in the big above-ground reservoirs and canal systems that store and move water over vast parts of the state. California's economy would be far smaller and much less active than it is today.

If there is "pork" in this bond it is in the eye of the beholder. As an example, someone in Northern California might argue that groundwater cleanup efforts that the water bond would fund are "pork," but if you live in parts of the San Gabriel Valley where groundwater is contaminated because of former aerospace and other industrial byproduct waste discharges, such cleanup projects are critical.

Still others routinely argue that building above-ground water storage is "pork." Those who live in the San Joaquin Valley and all too often see massive amounts of water flowing to the ocean in flood releases and lost to future beneficial use probably have a different opinion.

Interestingly, it was those who yelled the loudest about "pork" who were the same interests who made certain non-water related parks and trail ways were included in the bond. Parks, trails and other recreational features are perks that may have their place but water supply certainty is far more important.

Many of us are very proud of our valley legislators for understanding the critical importance of a safe and reliable water supply to our Valley and all Californians. Water is not a Republican or Democratic issue. It is a human need that requires joining forces to be successful.

Hopefully these two extra years will allow the economy and state financial condition to improve and provide a better shot for the water bond to be successful. That in turn would create thousands of good paying jobs and ensure the necessary future supplies to meet human needs and economic stability, supporting a bigger and better California.