

The Water Bond...Letting Go Of The North South Divide



By **Billie Greer**

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In the nick of time, the legislature and the Governor have produced a \$7.5 billion water bond proposal for voter consideration in November. There is a lot to love in this proposal. Capturing and storing water during wet years, knowing that droughts are a given. Cleaning up our water supplies to ensure safe drinking water, along with recycling and conservation, among other efforts. That's the good news. The uncertain news is — Will the proposal rekindle the water wars of the past as the ballot measure campaign moves forward?

Three years ago, in Fox & Hounds, I referenced the renowned film Chinatown, starring Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, which was based in part on real events that fostered water wars when William Mulholland acted on behalf of Los Angeles interests to secure water rights in Northern California. The main character in the film is L.A. Detective Jake Gittes who uncovers a vast conspiracy focused on the supply of water, overlaid with state and municipal corruption, with a least one murder thrown into the mix. Although this film was set in the early 1900s there are still people today who remain convinced that the Southland is stealing Northern California's water. California's history is steeped in water (no pun intended) and it was all about Who Has the Water? Who Wants the Water? And, Who is Going to Get It?

Luckily, there are signs of a truce this go-around. The controversial tunnels that would move water underneath the Delta into the systems that deliver water to Southern California and other portions of the state, although very important to ensuring a reliable, safe flow of water, are not part of this water bond. Legislators, both North and South and in between, voted overwhelmingly to support this new water bond measure, recognizing the critical need for funding improvements to California's water system which sustains our state's economy and the well being of all of us who live and work in the state. And, the water bond is the result of bipartisan cooperation at its best – with both parties negotiating in good faith for the good of all Californians. The leadership shown by the Governor, Senate President pro Tem, Assembly Speaker and the minority leaders of both houses in shaping the water bond speaks volumes about the value placed on meeting the state's water needs throughout California.

No time to rest, though, with the November election just two and a half months away. According to a survey conducted in July by the Public Policy Institute of California, "51% of

likely voters said they would vote yes on the \$11.1 billion water bond” (which was in place at that time and subsequently supplanted by the new bond measure approved by the legislature), “with support increasing to 59% if the bond amount were smaller. This is higher than in March 2013 when only 42% of likely voters said they would vote yes on the \$11.1 billion bond, and 55% supporting a smaller bond.” Although there seems to be an upswing in voter support, we should not be complacent. Sacramento’s action this week has demonstrated that regional differences can be put aside and a proposal can be hammered out that works for Californians up and down the state. Let’s hope that this spirit of cooperation continues as voters consider the merits of the water bond proposal.

This California water story is an exciting quest to make the investments needed to accommodate the water needs of all Californians. Case closed, Detective Gittes!

Billie Greer is President of the Southern California Leadership Council, whose mission is to preserve and enhance the region’s economic vitality, job growth and quality of life. Founded six years ago as a non-partisan, business-led public policy partnership, the Council’s Board members include three former California Governors and two dozen Presidents and CEOs of Southern California companies

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