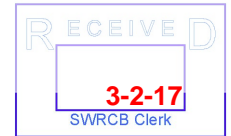


**From:** Peterson, Alan  
**To:** [commentletters](#)  
**Subject:** More Water, Not Less!  
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January 13, 2017

More Water, Not Less!

Each of us is dependent on water from the rivers that flow through our region. Without that water, we live in a desert instead of the world's most fertile valley. Surface water recharges our groundwater and helps reduce nitrate and salt issues in our soil. I recently attended the December 19, 2016 State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) hearing in Merced and watched with disgust their reaction to our many community members' comments regarding the Board's current Bay Delta Plan. They were clearly just going through the motions. The Board was unwilling to genuinely listen to a community that could lose up to 25% of its existing surface water under this plan. The potential economic losses equate up to \$234 million for Merced (Merced Irrigation District economic impact study), and \$1.6 billion for the Turlock and Modesto area (Turlock and Modesto Irrigation Districts economic study). Many of us feel our state has reached a new low in its ability to apply common sense when faced with difficult decisions.

The discussion that day should have been about maximizing storage capabilities during wet years and how to implement the best available science to restore the salmon population. Increasing reservoir capacity will increase economic opportunity for a region where 50% of the population receives Medi-Cal services. Instead, the discussion was about decreasing opportunity, further exasperating economic and social issues. We need leaders who have the foresight of past generations, who view our region as a place of abundance not scarcity, who choose equitable compromise over unaccountable dictates.

Another proposal, the Twin Tunnels project, will divert Sacramento River flows to southern California before the water reaches the Delta. This is why the SWRCB is trying to reallocate--steal--our water. The Twin Tunnels project will not move forward without approval of the Bay Delta Plan. Both proposals are driven by an unholy alliance of Delta farmers, environmentalists, the sports fishing industry, and southern California politicians. The Governor seems willing to sacrifice our region's water needs for the benefit of the rest of the state. The risks far outweigh the reward. It threatens our state and country's food supply as well as the economies of the counties being asked to give up their water.

While some call the Twin Tunnels project bold and innovative, taking water from the north and giving it to the south has been happening for over 70 years. Bold and innovative is what Israel is doing. One of the driest countries in world, mired in daily conflict, Israel is producing more water than it needs through new desalination technology (Scientific American, July 2016). This groundbreaking process removes salt from the Mediterranean Sea, making the water potable. A desalination plant in Carlsbad was just completed and will supply the San Diego area with 8-10% of its water needs, using the largest, drought-proof reservoir in the world, the Pacific Ocean. This plant was built for \$1 billion and it will pump millions of dollars into the local community, as it has created hundreds of permanent jobs (San Diego Tribune). For the cost of the Twin Tunnels project (over \$14 billion), we could build 14 of these plants, essentially solving our water problems.

This is not just a farming issue; it affects every single one of us. Less water equates to less employment, which equates to less economic activity in all sectors of our economy. We are just beginning to recover from the Great Recession in which housing prices declined 25-50%; that was a painful yet temporary condition. This plan and its resulting impact are permanent. We do not want to return to an economy similar to that of 2009. This is not hyperbole. Farmers barely have enough water now, and it is only because they pump groundwater to offset the lack of surface water. With the new groundwater regulations that will soon go into effect, farmers will run out of options.

If you think this is not your problem, consider what Dr. Steven Gomes, the Merced County Superintendent of Schools, stated at the December 19th hearing: "20,000 students attending schools in Merced County are dependent on school district wells located on their campuses for drinking water, restrooms, and sanitation for cafeterias. Under the Board's proposal, I am confident these wells will go dry in the near future." Dr. Gomes cited the dramatic decrease in the well water level supplying LeGrand Elementary School, which has dropped 103 feet in 11 years! If this plan moves forward, school districts and other government agencies in neighboring counties may face similar unintended consequences. Why would we consider a plan that the Board admits would cause "significant and unavoidable" economic damage?

I am writing about this because, as the Superintendent of the Merced Union High School District (MUHSD), I have a fierce desire to make sure the 10,000 students in our district are afforded the same or better opportunities as previous generations. Recently, our state has made much needed funding changes to education. As a high-performing and high-functioning district, I applaud the governor for being a champion of funding equity--districts now receive more money for students in challenging circumstances. This extra funding provides the 76% of our student body living in low-socioeconomic circumstances support and opportunity that just a few short years ago, seemed unattainable. Fundamental change is creating fundamental equality in the educational system.

With the SWRCB's plan, a wrench is being thrown into what should be exciting and optimistic times in education. The current proposal severely impacts education in our region; a region that is already struggling economically. Less water will amount to declining enrollment due to the inevitable decline in employment opportunities. Declining enrollment will amount to decreased funding. When districts have declining enrollment, they cannot maintain existing programs that support students or keep pace with statutory benefits, and step and column salaries. We are dependent on water for economic growth. Our state asks our schools to focus on equity of opportunity and the narrowing of achievement gaps. We are all making great progress, and we ask our state to not make an intentional decision that will impede or negate that progress.

We are small players in the state's political machine. We must step up to this challenge and work together to see that "Dust Bowl" remains a reference to beer in our area, rather than a reference to the landscape of our region. The MUHSD and its Board of Trustees is committed to bringing attention to this matter and ensuring that our community's voice is heard.

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"Excellence is a gradual result of always striving to do better."

-Pat Riley



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