

The Costliest Infrastructure Project in Recent History Won't Be on Your Ballot, But You Can Still Be Heard

By Don Nottoli and Chuck Winn

The California Primary Election on June 5 will give voters the opportunity to decide on candidates and critical issues that will have major state and local impacts. It's how the democratic process should work. That's not the case for Governor Jerry Brown's \$17+ billion twin tunnels project, known as WaterFix, which completely bypasses a vote of the people.

WaterFix amounts to sizable rate increases for tens of millions of Californians living in the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) service area. Deep-pocketed water districts that decimated the Owens Valley still have tunnel vision. When all seemed lost for the tunnels and financing could not be agreed upon, MWD, intent on locking in a huge water grab, agreed to fund most of the tunnels project hypothesizing that it could squeeze substantial funds from other water districts when they got thirsty down the road.

Influenced by MWD, the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD), which unanimously declined to financially support WaterFix last Fall, reversed its position and voted to contribute up to \$650 million after receiving the full \$485 million in funding from the California Water Commission for the Pacheco project that the water district had been seeking. This got SCVWD two seats on the newly formed Joint Powers Authority (JPA) that will oversee design and construction of WaterFix. SCVWD thought they'd have a lead role at the decision table, but they won't because MWD and other interest groups are the majority members on the JPA Board.

Despite this latest hurdle, the Delta Counties Coalition will continue to fight against WaterFix to protect the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and provide all Californians with better, reliable, and less costly water solutions. Californians deserve 21st Century solutions that can more effectively meet our water needs and will not harm the Delta, such as projects that promote greater regional self-reliance, levee reinforcement, desalination, and above-and-below-ground storage.

There is a finite capacity to generate ratepayer dollars for investments in water system improvements. WaterFix takes from opportunities to invest in more beneficial and cost-effective projects that, unlike WaterFix, add to the state's water supply with fewer environmental impacts. Water interests in Kern County are global leaders in their ability to convey water from multiple sources taking advantage of surface water flows in wet years to store excess water underground for use in droughts. Projects like Isabella Lake Dam Safety Modification Project will reduce the flood risk and protect an important water supply for the greater Bakersfield community.

While voters will not have a say about WaterFix at the ballot box next month, the DCC and other statewide interests are aggressively pursuing actions to stop the tunnels. Governor Brown terms out this year and the next governor must know that you and most Californians are against it.

Join us in our fight to save the Delta and deliver genuine statewide water solutions that will serve to unite rather than divide Californians. Visit sharedwatersolutions.com to learn more.

The DCC is an alliance of the counties of Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano and Yolo. The DCC advocates for protecting the interests of the Delta and California's water supply and has produced a set of approaches that will achieve balance for the economic and environmental health of the Delta while also improving water supply stability. For more information regarding the DCC and its ideas for fixing California's water issues, please visit sharedwatersolutions.com.