


# Al Smith and Chuck Riojas: Perea's water bond bill is best option

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By Al Smith and Chuck Riojas

With the driest year on record, and Thursday's deadline to send a revised water bond to Gov. Jerry Brown looming, the Legislature must agree on a water bond that meets the demands of all regions throughout the state and voters.

Over the last six months, nearly a dozen bond proposals have been submitted for consideration, including several from San Joaquin Valley legislators such as Assembly Members Henry T. Perea, D-Fresno, and Frank Bigelow, R-O'Neals, and state Sen. Andy Vidak, R-Hanford.

Perea's bill, AB 2686, has emerged as one of the most-supported in the state and Valley. Assembly Members Bigelow, Adam Gray, D-Merced, and Rudy Salas, D-Bakersfield, signed on as authors, and state Sen. Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres, and Assembly Member Dan Logue, R-Marysville, are co-authoring the effort.

In 2009, a bipartisan effort led to the passage of the current bond, but it has since shown uncertainty of receiving voter approval, partially because of its \$11 billion price tag.

Twice that package has been taken off the ballot, in 2010 and 2012, amidst a recession and budget uncertainty. However, we now have a third opportunity to gain voter support for a bond that is necessary to maintain California's vitality. This could be the last chance we may have for years to protect public health and the economic well-being of California.

Politics aside, the water bond proposal the Legislature sends to Gov. Brown must strike a balance between vital surface water storage projects and other water projects, including funding for groundwater cleanup, water recycling, water conservation, drinking water, treatment plants, and urban rivers and watersheds such as the Los Angeles River.

Few bonds have been crafted so carefully as to take the whole portfolio of water interests into account with California's long-term water plan in mind. AB 2686 strikes the right balance for nearly \$2 billion less than the current bond.

Investment in a large-scale water project now will save voters money down the road. The longer we wait, the more costs will rise as inflation occurs and our current water structure worsens.

Investment in our infrastructure and innovative water reliability technology creates and maintains jobs. These large-scale water infrastructure investments will not only create a drought-proof water supply, but also lead to the creation of thousands of jobs throughout the state.

Other priorities like addressing regional water supply improvements, expanding water conservation efforts, and promoting watershed and habitat restoration are just as important. A bond that makes these investments could prevent current drought-related economic impacts such as water rationing and higher food costs.

The bond proposal the Legislature should send to the governor for approval is AB 2686. With bipartisan

support and approval by stakeholders with varying interests, the bond accomplishes certain goals, but doesn't force choices about which regions deserve safe and reliable water.

Approving a carefully crafted bond that meets state demands will provide good paying jobs, keep costs of food low and provide economic stability — thus creating a more prosperous and ecologically stable California for generations to come.

Al Smith is president and CEO of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce. Chuck Riojas is financial secretary/treasurer of the Fresno chapter of the Building and Construction Trades Council, AFL-CIO.