

Government red tape holds up reliable water supply

By Kristin Olsen Special to The Bee

California's drought affects us all. Lack of water hurts those who live in urban and rural communities, work in a high-tech company or on a farm. Water shortages impact job opportunities, economic growth and our health and well-being.

Wells in communities across our state have literally run dry. This drought emergency isn't a drill – precious lives and whole industries are on the line right now, waiting for state bureaucrats to act.

Kristin Olsen

Meanwhile, government red tape continues to hold up the construction and completion of much-needed water projects across our state.

One example involves proposed desalination plants.

Desalination turns salt water from the ocean into clean drinking water for Californians. It is an increasingly popular source of water for many cities since it is a "drought-proof" supply. We can go years without much rain, but the ocean will always have water.

One plant is under construction in Carlsbad. When fully operational, the Carlsbad project will turn as much as 56 million gallons of water from the Pacific Ocean into drinking water each day. For just half a penny per gallon, or less than \$1 a day to meet an entire household's water needs, the project will provide as much as 7 percent of San Diego County's water supply by the year 2020.

Sadly, the project took nearly 20 years to start construction, as it was the target of 14 legal challenges and duplicative bureaucracy, subject to environmental reviews from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the California Coastal Commission, the state Department of Health, the city of Carlsbad and numerous local agencies.

Astonishingly, state regulators recently acted to impose even more rules, restrictions and roadblocks on desalination plants. It is estimated that this will increase the cost of building and operating such facilities by hundreds of millions of dollars. This is foolish.

Another dozen desalination projects are currently on the drawing board in our state. We need to expedite the construction of these plants, not continue to tie them up in endless years of bureaucracy and litigation.

At the same time, we need to speed up new water storage projects that were approved by voters in the water bond measure last fall.

Right now, two surface water storage projects are on the table – Temperance Flat near Fresno and Sites Reservoir near Colusa. These projects have undergone significant planning and review at the local, state and federal levels. Sites Reservoir was first proposed in the 1980s. More than two decades later, no shovels have turned.

Assembly Republicans recently proposed legislation, Assembly Bill 311, to streamline the approval process for water



storage projects like Sites and Temperance Flat, in the same way as was done for the new Sacramento Kings basketball arena. Unfortunately, our proposal was blocked by the majority party.

State government should be doing everything it can to alleviate our current drought emergency and prevent future droughts from devastating our economy and hurting California families.

We must modernize laws and streamline permitting regulations that are standing in the way of more storage, desalination, water recycling and other projects that will increase water supply for communities throughout all of California – north, south, east and west.

California is in the midst of a water crisis. It's time for the Legislature and administration to rework misguided laws and regulations that are standing in the way of generating the water we need. People are tired of endless, bureaucratic delays. They deserve better.

Kristin Olsen of Modesto is the Republican leader of the California Assembly. She represents the 12th Assembly District.