

# Local lawmakers oppose water rules



Tim Doyle stands with the nearly operational pump #45 on South I Street in Tulare on Tuesday. It is expected to provide 1,100 to 1,200 gallons per minute. PHOTOS BY RON HOLMAN

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Local Republican representatives and clean water advocates, once partners in fighting off drought impacts, are split on Gov. Jerry Brown's newly-signed legislation that calls on cities and water districts to establish water conservation standards.

The new standards must be met, even when the state isn't in a drought.

Brown signed into law SB 606 to help the state better prepare for droughts and climate change, establishing water efficiency standards for each water district.

"In preparation for the next drought and our changing environment, we must use our precious resources wisely,"

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A 2-million-gallon water tank is under construction on Alpine Avenue in Tulare on Tuesday.



# Rules

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Brown said. "We have efficiency goals for energy and cars — and now we have them for water."

The bill's provisions include:

- Establishing an indoor, per person water use goal of 55 gallons per day until 2025, 52.5 gallons from 2025 to 2030 and 50 gallons beginning in 2030.

- Creating incentives for water suppliers to recycle water.

- Requiring both urban and agricultural water suppliers to set annual water budgets and prepare for drought.

Robert Hertzberg said his bill presents a contemporary solution to the drought without spending billions on dams.

"This is another important step in the Legislature's focused effort to re-engineer water policy away from crisis management and toward a 21st-century approach," he said.

"I want to thank the governor and his staff for their creative vision, and my colleagues in both houses for their hard work to bring this across the finish line."

California State Senator Andy Vidak (R-Hanford) voted against SB 606, saying locals were left out of the decision-making process.

"This was just another in a long line of bills taking local decision-making about water issues away from folks at the local level and instead, unfortunately, allowing Sacramento bureaucrats to make those decisions," he said.

California State Senator Jean Fuller (R-Bakersfield) also voted against the bill.

"Senate Bill 606 assumes every community in every part of the state is equal and have similar challenges — that isn't true," she said. "The result of this bill would be to limit the flexibility that water districts have to attain conservation goals, ultimately limiting their ability to manage their resources effectively."

Fuller voted against SB 606 because she wanted local control when decisions about water are made.

"Local governments and locally elected officials are responsible for ensuring they can provide the services needed to their communities," she said. "An unelected board, appointed by politicians, cannot be held accountable for the decisions they make by the constitu-

ents they impact."

SB 606 supporters include the California Water Association, the California League of Conservation Voters and the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water.

Those who opposed SB 606 include the California Coastkeeper Alliance, the California Special Districts Association, and the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District.

## The great divide

The political party and geography split was also evident in the California Assembly and AB 1668.

"Gov. Brown challenged every Californian to embrace water efficiency during the drought, and with his signature on AB 1668, we'll have the state working collaboratively with local governments and urban water suppliers to put in place water efficiency standards that will help every community focus on sustainability," Assemblywoman Laura Friedman said.

"It's a balanced approach that puts efficiency first and gives water agencies the flexibility to embrace innovation and tailor their policies to meet the unique needs of their community."

Devon Mathis (R-Visalia) voted against AB 1668.

"The fundamental problem with this new law is that you cannot conserve your way out of a drought," Mathis said. "This law ignores the role of additional water storage in battling future droughts."

Mathis also criticized the new laws for an approach that does not include room for differences among communities.

"Furthermore, one of the main problems is, it's a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to reflect the different circumstances in each community, and this type of approach has the potential to strand investments, artificially inflate water rates with commensurate benefit, and negatively affect local economies and placing a larger burden on Californians," he said.

Similar to Vidak, Mathis also said water use decisions impacting Central Valley residents should be made by people who live here.

"Additionally, the law grants new significant authority to the State Water Resource Control Board (SWRCB), an unelected bureaucracy that already enjoys substantial police power over your

water use," he said.

Supporters for AB 1668 include the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability and the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

Two local prominent organizations that previously worked on drought impacts are supporting the new law.

Self Help Enterprises supports AB 1668 while the Community Water Center, which advocates for clean water, supported the newly-signed law and its provisions.

"Based on our experience during the recent drought, and that of our partner communities around the San Joaquin Valley, we feel that drought contingency planning for rural communities, as is called for in AB1668, is sorely needed," said Paul Boyer, community development program director.

"It seems practical to implement this planning at the county-wide level, as counties are the first line of defense in disaster situations, and also practical for the state to bear the brunt of the expense of this planning effort by providing guidance and recommendations."

Jonathan Nelson, Community Water Center's policy director, said there's support for AB 1668.

"The reason why is this bill encourages water conservation," he said. "In the Valley, given the drought and the impacts, it is not only a question of if, but when the next drought will hit."

Nelson said local communities must be ready when the drought comes around.

"You want to make sure you have a plan in place before it hits," he said. "That's a positive step."

Kevin McCusker, a Cal Water spokesperson, said previous conservation work and goals have placed Visalia on good ground to meet upcoming standards.

"These bills (AB 1668 and SB 606) are part of the continued process to establish long-term water-use efficiency standards in the state," he said.

"Cal Water is actively engaged in various rulemakings with state agencies regarding implementation of these regulations. We are well positioned to meet any standard adopted and will comply with all regulations required of utilities."

Cal Water owns and operates Visalia's water system and systems across the state.