

OPINION: TEXAS LEGISLATURE MUST TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO INVEST IN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

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The old saying that “whiskey’s for drinking and water’s for fighting,” still bodes true as the state’s growth places unprecedented demand on Texas’ water resources. And though these fights may be more civilized than they once were, they are no less controversial. As the “Texas Miracle” continues, the state’s population boom brings nearly 1,300 people to the Lone Star State each day.

And none are bringing water with them.

In addition to population growth, aging infrastructure worsens the state’s water woes. In rural Texas, more than half of the water lines are more than 40 years old and beyond their useful life, according to a survey from the Texas Rural Water Association. Urban systems are equally aging and in need of upgrades. Since 2008, boil water notices have more than tripled across the state. The American Society of Civil Engineers rated the state’s water, wastewater, and flood infrastructure in 2021, giving it a C- at best.

The state’s flood and drought cycles aren’t helping. Extreme weather events like Winter Storm Uri and record-breaking hot, dry summers contribute to pipeline breaks and reduce water supplies, exacerbating impacts to already overtaxed systems. Flood impacts are also increasing and are not limited to the coast; every county in Texas has experienced a major flood disaster according to FEMA.

It’s time for a generational investment in the state’s water resources. The Texas economy is the 9th largest in the world and the fastest growing in the nation. According to the State Water Plan, if the state fails to invest in its water infrastructure, Texas risks up to \$153 billion in economic losses by 2070.

Voters overwhelmingly agree. In a poll by Texas 2036, 82% of voters agree that the state should increase investments to expand our water supplies. Further, 84% want the legislature to act by creating a fund to help upgrade aging infrastructure.

The state has a historic \$33 billion dollar budget surplus. Sen. Charles Perry and Rep. Tracy King propose to direct part of the surplus to replacing aging infrastructure and creating new water sources through SB 28 and SJR 75. The state budget also presents opportunities to replenish the Flood Infrastructure Fund, which will soon be depleted despite nearly \$40 billion identified future project needs in regional flood plans.

There’s another old saying: “nothing worth having comes easy.” As the legislative session closes in less than a month, the clock is ticking to ensure the state’s water systems are equipped to keep up with its growth. The Legislature should dedicate \$3 to \$5 billion of the state’s surplus to assist in these efforts and help lay the groundwork for a “Texas Miracle 2.0” – one that will continue the prosperity of the Lone Star State long into the future.

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