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A bond measure worth considering

Created: 03/13/2010 06:37:33 PM PST

This is not a great year to have an \$11.1 billion water bond measure on the November ballot.

The economy is in the tank, the state's fiscal condition is in the toilet, jobs are still being flushed - choose your watery metaphor. It's a bad time to take on more debt and a lousy time to ask voters to approve a bond measure.

But this particular bond measure will need your full consideration over the next seven months. It's important.

We don't say that lightly. We wrote in an October 2004 editorial recommending no votes on that November's bond measures that the state could no longer afford to borrow money. We've maintained that stance since, except for recommending a highway bond measure in 2006 (when we said no to four other bonds) because we deemed the highway work so important.

This water bond measure is much more important than the highway money because this one could stave off a disaster - an actual disaster.

Two local water experts - Ken Willis, chairman of the Chino Basin Watermaster board, and Rich Atwater, CEO of Inland Empire Utilities Agency - stopped by the other day to underscore the water bond's importance.

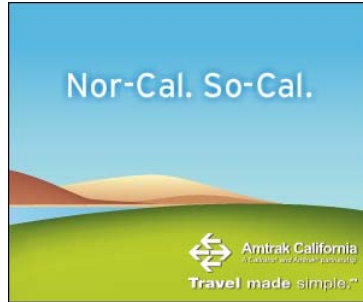
Willis, also an Upland councilman and a former board member of the State Water Resources Board, talked about the catastrophe - economic and otherwise - that would follow a major breach in one of the earthen levees in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta estuary. Some of those levees are a hundred years old, and

they basically sit on peat moss, he said. But they are all that keeps saltwater from the San Francisco Bay from contaminating and making unusable the Delta's fresh water - which provides most of the potable water for Southern California.

We're all familiar with the Central Valley and Southern California water shortages caused in part by a legal ruling that reduced flows from the Delta to protect fish. That's nothing compared to the complete cutoff of Delta water that would follow a big levee breach. Willis' city, Upland, has enough of its own water to meet 70percent of its need, but many Southern California cities have to import up to 90percent of their water.

Loss of that water "threatens every factory, small business and farm" here and in the Central Valley, Willis said. It would bring an already stumbling state economy to its knees.

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The most important part of the November water bond is the funding to strengthen the Delta's levees and other infrastructure. The bond would provide money for water recycling projects and for groundwater cleanup - both of which are vital to Inland Valley water supplies - but nothing comes close to the importance of fixing the Delta.

We'll revisit this measure several times before the November election. It needs to be on every voter's radar.

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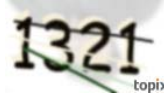
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