

Market-Based Water Conservation Makes Sense

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By District 2 Councilmember Kevin Faulconer



No time to waste. No water to waste.

Many of us have heard the slogan, and numerous San Diegans are heeding the advice of Mayor Jerry Sanders and the City Council. Citywide, we've seen a 19 percent reduction in water use in the last year, but our supply is shrinking and our costs are rising.

We have to make changes in how we use water and from where we get it.

It is my belief that the best way to achieve reductions in water usage is through a market-based approach. In other words, the city needs to create an aggressive "tiered rate structure" for its water consumers. In such a system, efficient users would be rewarded with lower water bills and wasteful users would be penalized with higher bills.

The good news is some restrictions, such as watering days, can be eliminated with the successful implementation of a tiered system because the market will determine efficient water users, meaning many of those who are wasteful will likely reduce their consumption so they can lower their cost. It's similar to gasoline consumption. When gas prices rise people drive less. I believe that we can see similar effects from a tiered rate water system.

Numerous studies, including those conducted by the California Department of Water Resources, have indicated the most effective means of reducing water consumption is through modifying rates.

It is my goal to implement a model that is effective year-round and does not require continuous council approval. If implemented correctly, we can adopt a system that reduces consumption year-round, eliminates the use of watering days for customers, and avoids the use of water cops to monitor homes and businesses.

It is important that we work quickly in developing a long-term plan in addressing our water crisis.

In May 2010, the San Diego County Water Authority is expected to let districts throughout the county know if further water reductions are needed. The Water Authority issued a mandatory 8 percent reduction in San Diego starting June 1. It is my intent that we are prepared for further reductions, eliminating the use of stop-gap measures that would ultimately hinder our local economy and quality of life.

As I've said, I believe the quickest and most cost-effective approach to water conservation is through the use of rates to discourage waste. Once such a system is in place, we will be able to focus on long-term infrastructure projects that include increasing our local water supply and lowering our dependence on imported water.

Eighty-two percent of the water we use in San Diego comes from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and the Colorado River. Since we're dependent on that water, we are subject to the rate increases of transferring that water. These costly transfer rates are expected to increase 20 percent over the next three years.

The city is conducting studies on how to effectively increase our local supply. I'd also like to see San Diego work with private businesses to determine the feasibility of installing a desalination plant in the city — similar to one scheduled to be constructed in the city of Carlsbad.

We all need to do our part to conserve water.

It's a priority at my house, something my wife and I discuss with our two young children. Overall, our water use has steadily dropped — from an average of 18.25 units in 2007 to 15.16 units in 2008 to 13.6 units so far this year. That's a 34 percent reduction in two years. Although we've cut back, we're continuing to look at ways to decrease our use.

— *Council President Pro Tem Kevin L. Faulconer represents District 2 in San Diego, including Ocean Beach, Point Loma, Pacific Beach and Mission Beach.*