

## Water policy called vital issue for Texas

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Water policy will remain a legislative priority for years to come as Texas grapples with a booming population competing for scarcer resources, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst told more than 400 water experts in San Antonio on Monday.

Dewhurst has been a key backer of legislation to update water law and planning over the past four years. He said getting Senate Bill 3 — an omnibus water bill addressing reservoir sites, water for rivers and bays, groundwater planning and infrastructure funding — was difficult but critical for the state to firm up planning for surface water supplies.

"I mean literally, we would have had areas of the state drying up, and they would have been boarding up downtowns if we hadn't come up with the policies on surface water and rivers and reservoirs," he said in an interview after his luncheon speech. "Our next big hurdle is to address groundwater."

Dewhurst's comments came at the annual Texas Water Summit, a two-day event held this year at the Convention Center. It's sponsored by the Texas Water Development Board, a planning agency born at the end of the state's worst drought 50 years ago.

"Obviously, our groundwater is as important as our surface water," Dewhurst said. "We've been focusing on surface water, but groundwater is extremely important for the future, and I want to work with the senators and come up with a comprehensive policy that will address it."

Dewhurst announced appointments of senators to two key panels created in SB 3. He named Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-Mission; Robert Duncan, R-Lubbock; and Kevin Eltife, R-Tyler; to the Joint Interim Committee on State Water Funding and Kip Averitt, R-Waco; Glenn Hegar, R-Katy; and Kim Brimer, R-Fort Worth; to the Environmental Flows Advisory Group.

Duncan earlier in the day addressed a session on groundwater, saying it needs to be shared and not hoarded but used in a way that it will last well into the future.

Among the topics addressed by about 65 speakers during the conference are innovative technologies, water law, water infrastructure financing and water conservation.

"This is an opportunity for us to get our best minds together about how to meet the water challenges of the future," said Carla Daws, spokeswoman for the Texas Water Development Board.

"It's going to be a cooperative effort from both inside and outside the state, and this is kind of a sharing of the minds to make sure we're on the same page."

The six members of the water development board will hold their monthly meeting in San Antonio today at 2 p.m. at the conclusion of the summit. The board usually meets in Austin.

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