

## Editorial: SAWS' rough waters concern whole city

Web Posted: 04/07/2008 06:01 PM CDT

### San Antonio Express-News

The San Antonio Water System board is on the cusp of huge decisions about water supply projects.

Those decisions will affect water rates and economic development for many years to come.

But alarmingly, board members are expressing frustration with the information they are being given by SAWS staff.

The previously subterranean friction went public last week when the Express-News quoted SAWS board Chairman Alex Briseño as saying, "The fact is the board members are only as good as the information we get.

"There are two issues here. One is not having timely information that I've been requesting on an ongoing basis, and the second is the rapid change in the escalating costs of this (water supply) plan that we need to get a handle on and that we need to be made aware of so we can plan for the future."

Briseño's comments were preceded by two notable events. He announced plans to create a task force to evaluate water supply plans, and then SAWS CEO David Chardavoyne revealed the cost of the 50-year water supply plan has jumped from \$2.8 billion to \$3.5 billion.

The day that the above quote was published, Chardavoyne's annual evaluation was scheduled for executive session, but he asked that it be conducted in public. The review was rescheduled for April 15.

Briseño's frustration centers on his feeling that the board is getting incomplete information from staff with last-minute surprises emerging when board members press for more details.

In recent meetings, the board delayed action on a staff recommendation to buy land for a well field to supply a proposed desalination plant and a decision on the desalination plant site.

Express-News water writer Jerry Needham revealed last week "a month ago, after continued prodding by Briseño for updated figures, the staff presented estimates showing the cost jumping from \$704 to \$1,375 an acre-foot."

The desalination project hit a big speed bump last year when Atascosa County residents balked at the plan to take brackish water from their county. Poor outreach by SAWS was a key factor in the upheaval.

Now, Briseño is complaining about the staff's communications with board members and questioning whether the desalination project should be a high priority.

The rhetoric has been tame. But if the board doesn't trust the information and cost estimates for key water supply projects, the problem is monumental.

Chardavoyne told Needham last week that he expects to fully address the concerns in his public review. Those explanations will be important to the entire city.

### FAIR USE NOTICE

*This document contains copyrighted material whose use has not been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Texas Living Waters Project, which is a nonprofit undertaking, is making this article available in our efforts to promote comprehensive water planning in Texas. We believe that this constitutes a "fair use" of the copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. If you wish to use this copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond "fair use", you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.*