

COMMENTARY

Hegar: Remember the importance of conservation

State Sen. Glenn Hegar, R-Katy, SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

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With soaring summer temperatures and severe drought conditions upon us, many citizens and community leaders will tell you that they are worried about having enough water. If they are lucky enough to have adequate water for now, then they are worried about water for the future.

As the drought in Texas worsens by the day, it is only natural that we discuss short-term and long-term water planning in Texas. Worry about the water supply is important in that it keeps us focused on an issue that is vital for the state's prosperity. But worry is not enough; we must adequately plan for the future needs of our communities.

As the drought grinds on and the flow in the Colorado River dwindles, concern about water has the potential to become divisive, we need facts, not just concerns, to guide policy.

Fortunately, we have the data and facts to guide decision-making. The Lower Colorado River Authority has put together solid information about the needs for water in the Colorado River basin for the next 100 years. The growth rate in our region dictates a longer outlook because the future is coming fast.

I'm a farmer and legislator, not a water planner, but I can easily see that the demand line crossing over the supply line will arrive in the coming years. As the state's population grows, the day the lines will cross gets closer and then we reach the point where we don't have enough water.

The recent efforts by LCRA have given us the tools to turn concern into action. Conservation at all levels must be enhanced, even when rains return the Colorado to its normal flow, as they will. But even with conservation and more efficient use of our water, we will need — as a unified basin — to take expensive and potentially controversial steps. Seventy-five years ago, our leaders did the same for us — that is why we have adequate water today.

Speaking of leaders, I think it is appropriate to compliment General Manager Tom Mason and his team for their leadership at LCRA. Mason has worked to improve the credibility, transparency and openness of LCRA.

Mason has even begun to receive compliments from some of LCRA's harshest critics — including me. It might seem ironic to some that I would compliment the management for more openness and transparency. Providing information — whether it is about the proposed LCRA/San Antonio Water System project, the Water Supply Resource Plan or the expected mandatory conservation triggers that could be activated by current conditions — is part of their responsibility to the people who rely on their stewardship of the Colorado River.

The Colorado River basin is entering uncharted territory in the 21st century and I remain hopeful that each and every member on the LCRA board of directors will reflect on the interest of the basin each and every day. Each member took an oath of office to "faithfully execute the duties of the office."

With one of the worst droughts in history bearing down on Texas, a national recession persisting, and the Colorado River basin at the crossroads of so many important decisions, we must focus on the facts and make prudent and rational decisions. Anything short will be a great disappointment for the people who call the Colorado River basin home and other Texans who are carefully watching to make sure decisions are truly for the people who live, work and rely on this valuable resource.

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