NORTH COUNTY TIMES | THE CALIFORNIAN

FORUM: What part of 'water crisis' escapes understanding?

JOHN E. (JACK) HOAGLAND -- Rancho California Water District | Posted: Thursday, October 15, 2009 12:00 am

As a result of my proposal for Rancho California Water District to temporarily stop issuing water supply letters (necessary in the approval process for new development) and to stop installing new water meters, I am asked "Don't I know these are tough economic times?"

Of course I know times are tough. The governor declared a statewide water shortage earlier this year. Metropolitan Water District of Southern California declared a regional shortage, resulting in a cut back of agricultural deliveries by 30 percent and everyone else by 10 percent effective this past July 1. This newspaper has done an excellent job of covering these stories as well as the additional burdens of regulatory restrictions on delivery of what little water remains available.

But does Southwest County need more commercial space now? I see hundreds of vacancies in malls, strip centers and commercial centers, much which were just completed. Do we need more homes? The media have described our area as having one of the highest foreclosure rates in the country. With all the excess and vacant developments maybe this is exactly the right time to address these problems.

Rancho California is your local provider of water service. However, every new drop of water demand has to be met with a supply from hundreds of miles away. The state water agencies and Metropolitan, the regional imported water supplier, have tried to pretend that this day would not arrive.

Commitments by the California State Water Project to supply water from Northern California to our food producers in Central California and urban users in Southern California have not been met nor are they even achievable since the project was partially completed in the early 1970s. The state Legislature has shown itself incapable of resolving the problems surrounding completion of the project for almost 40 years.

I believe that Rancho California's commitment is to our existing customers. Most people understand that when they are asked to conserve water that the idea should be to reduce the overall use footprint so that the limited supplies will prove reliable for the reduced demand. If additional demand is added, the conservation efforts are lost because demand is further increased and the reliability of the water supply remains uncertain. I completely support efforts to help our customers find ways to use water more efficiently and effectively. But I also believe we will have no credibility if we use the conservation savings to fuel additional demand for development.

We need action from the development community to pressure the Legislature to resolve the state water issues to ensure having a certain, permanent and reliable source of water for new demand.

I would like to hear your ideas and views at a public hearing at 6 p.m. Nov. 9, at the Rancho California Water District board room.

JOHN E. (JACK) HOAGLAND is a Rancho California Water District director.