

WATER

It's time to act on desalination

By Barbara Boxer

Climate change is here, and we must act now. This past summer, Californians experienced catastrophic wildfires that wiped out entire towns, took lives and brought pain and suffering to both the north and south of our state. If we do not respond to the climate change warnings before us, particularly drought, we will fail our children and our grandchildren who call California home. This is not just an environmental issue, it's a social justice issue.

In his first State of the State address this week, Governor Newsom was right in calling for a fresh approach to meeting California's "massive water challenges." He's correct in stating that "our water supply is becoming less reliable because of climate change. And our population is growing because of a strong economy."

While we may be experiencing rain now, we're still in a state of drought and environmental conditions are ever-changing. The Fourth Global Climate Assessment tells us that the water supply from snowpack is declining, ground water depletion is exacerbating risks and surface water quality is declining due to increases in pollutants. The Colorado River is dangerously overtaxed by the western United States and Mexico, a condition only aggravated by climate con-

ditions.

So, what does action look like? As Californians, I believe we must look west to the Pacific Ocean, where seawater desalination offers a proven, climate change-resilient solution. No longer do we need verification from Israel, the Middle East and Australia, where desalination facilities have literally helped save lives and fend off debilitating droughts due of climate change. Now, we can look much closer to home — in San Diego.

The Carlsbad Desalination Plant is the largest, most technologically advanced, energy-efficient and environmentally sound desalination plant in the Western Hemisphere. In its first 36 months of operation, the plant provided San Diego County with more than 40 billion gallons of fresh drinking water.

Seawater desalination is independent of climate and weather patterns and the Carlsbad facility has helped protect pub-

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lic health, safety and the economy during the worst recorded drought in California's history. Three years ago, during the commissioning of the plant, California Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins called the Carlsbad facility a "model" for how desalination should be done in California. She was right and more large-scale facilities modeled are needed.

I join Atkins in advocating for the Huntington Beach Desalination Project, which will provide 50 million gallons of fresh drinking water per day, restoring our aquifers and ensuring residents' needs are met under the conditions that will continue to be brought on by climate change.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, Controller Betty Yee and former Gov. Jerry Brown's representative all voted last year to move the HB Project forward at the State Lands Commission. As a United States senator, I staked my reputation on fighting for the environment, and along with my colleague Sen. Dianne Feinstein strongly supported seawater desalination for our country and for our state.

Now post-Senate, as a private citizen of California, I am doing everything I can to encourage state government to provide Californians with a climate-resilient water supply. The time is now.

Barbara Boxer previously represented California in the U.S. Senate.