

To: Professor Paul Manuel, Director, SPA Leadership Program
From: Peter Hutchinson
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Re: California Water Policy Leadership Issues Memo

Executive Summary

The California drought that some say has lasted from 2006 or 2012 (depending on the analysis given for the years 2010-2012) till 2017, while others still believe that given the shorter periods of non-drought compared to much longer drought times the drought has lasted over 100 years. The leadership over water policies that help to mitigate the effects of the drought have tough decisions to make in order to ensure the state can survive such drastic weather. These players however, as defined below, can create problems from the policies they implement. Three such issues arise in California's emergency water policies: the equity of water distribution, the competing interests of industry at a cost to citizens, and planning for the future. These issues and possible solutions for leaders to consider to resolve these problems are discussed at length below.

Key Leadership Players

Defining: In order to better understand how emergency drought policies can be considered a leadership issue, it is important to understand the leadership behind the creation and implementation of such policies. The decisions these leaders make create the issues that will be described in greater detail in the following paragraphs. The nature of organization in the managing of the state's water policies is both a part of the problems that arise and a part of the possible solutions to resolve the issue.

The Executive: The Governor of California is the chief executive of the state, and has the power to Institute emergency provisions that require the state water departments and boards to implement new procedures, restrictions, and even rationing to conserve water in times of serious drought conditions (PPIC, 2007). Within this branch of the state government, there are several boards, departments, and commissions that have jurisdiction over water policy: the

Fish and Game Department, the Department of Water Resources, the Fish and Game Commission, and the State Water Control Board (PPIC, 2007). The current governor of the state is Jerry Brown (D-CA).

Regional: While the legislature has some authority in the development of normal state water policies, the regional boards and local water district providers have significant authority to decide and implement local restrictions and procedures (PPIC, 2007). The reason behind this is because the state uses a form of cooperative federalism that decentralizes state water policy to be specific towards local communities (PPIC, 2007). There are nine regional water quality control boards, and hundreds of water districts that vary in size, customers and whether or not the districts are public or private given that in certain systems water is considered a commodity (PPIC, 2007).

Issue One: Equity

The Issue: During times of drought, water policies make tough determinations of who gets water and does not. The decisions leaders make can be difficult but the effects that have can sometimes be mitigated better. The Pacifica Institute created an analysis of the equity of emergency drought policies and concluded that several different issues were created. First, the water shortages, restrictions, and rising costs affected people's access to safe, clean water inside their homes (Pacifica Institute, 2017). The report also concluded that the policies disproportionately affected low-income households, people of color, and communities already burdened with environmental pollution (Pacifica Institute, 2017). It is clear that that the water policy decisions can have significant effect on the lives of all people, but when they specifically affect certain groups, an equity problem arises for which leaders must find solutions.

Solutions: The Pacifica Institute provided some solutions that leaders could implement to better serve the diverse communities that reside in the state. These included establishing a statewide, quantitative metric for measuring water supply reliability for public water systems and requiring both public and private water districts to follow standardized rules (Pacifica Institute,

2017). An additional suggestion is to ensure drought surcharges are not applied to basic water use based on the number of people in the household (Pacifica Institute, 2017). Many people find issues with the fairness of distribution and discontent with the leadership decisions made. The State and water boards, must be able to enact policies during emergencies that are tough but fair across the state. If there are to be restrictions or rationing, than every person must be have at least equal access to the water that's available.

Issue Two: Interest Groups

The Issue: As in any policy creation and issue, interest groups play an important role is helping decide what policies. The same can be said in California's water policy creation and implementation. The problem, however, is that water is an essential need for all people, wildlife, and plants which leads to interest groups pushing for unfair policies towards each other and everyday citizens. Two particular industries attempt to exert influence over water policies: fishermen and farmers. The latter of the two is relatively simple to understand. California's massive agriculture production is greatly affected by droughts, and the water farmers use are consistently under scrutiny by citizens and politicians while also seeking greater financial and water support (Wines and Medina, 2015). The subsidies they receive, however, are hotly contested by citizens and some politicians, but also by fishermen, who, during times of drought, face declining fish populations and thus declining incomes (Schmeiser, 2017). Both groups demand support from the state to provide either more water or more money, both at a cost to the citizens of the state.

Solutions: Researcher Caleb Scoville points out that citizens of the state must take their civil responsibility seriously, and to elect leaders that resist the industrialization and commercialization of water distribution that allow interest groups to be powerful (Scoville, 2015). A further solution is to support businesses of all kinds to have better water management, during and after droughts. A sustainability expert at a consulting firm in California, Kirsten James suggests requiring the State Water Resources Control Board to create a statewide data

platform for water resources that would help businesses create management plans to better conserve. It is clear that elected leaders must be able to resist the special interests, especially during times of drought. Even so, it is also important to work with interests of all kinds to ensure that the private sector is playing a role in conserving water that benefits of the whole state. Without this dual nature approach, the problem of equity would be exacerbated beyond what was discussed above.

Issue Three: The Future

The Issue: Planning for the future is an essential step that California must take if it is to remain successful during the next drought, which may be even worse. This planning, however, can create issues both today and in the future that the leaders must understand. The issues of the future are easy to foresee, but difficult to solve. The water infrastructure of the state, such as pipes, aqueducts, and dams are aging and could begin to fail at more significant rates (PPIC, 2018). The demand on agriculture is becoming less flexible as more of the country and the world relies on the supply from the state (PPIC, 2018). The issues between human consumption and industry needs for water are becoming more exacerbated (PPIC, 2018). Most importantly, as climate change continues to create uncertainty about the environment, the next drought could be worse and longer than previous ones (PPIC, 2018).

Solutions: The Public Policy Institute of California created a report that discussed the issues cited above, and provided solutions towards addressing the future of California's water policies. A very clear solution is that state leaders must begin to assess the infrastructure of water, working in coordination with local and regional boards and water districts, to better prioritize the fixes (PPIC, 2018). Leaders must learn from the previous drought about issues that developed such as equity and competing interests to better manage the distribution of water during droughts (PPIC, 2018). Finally, as is often the case when looking towards future policy, funding to water infrastructure and drought preparedness must be increased if the state is to continue to meet demand, especially when water becomes scarce (PPIC, 2018).

Conclusions

_____The leadership of California's water policy creation and implementation have many problems that face them when making decisions. This is only made more difficult when times of drought make the impact of their policies even greater than they would be during wet seasons. It is clear that three key issues face these leaders: equity, interest groups, and future planning. Identifying these issues is already a significant step towards addressing them, and realizing their impact on citizens and industry alike is essential to effective leadership during times of crisis. Creating policies that ensure a fair distribution of water is essential to ensuring more equitable treatment of the state's citizens. Cooperating with businesses to develop better private sector management of water, while resisting self-serving interests at the cost of citizens is also important to dealing with the competing special interest groups. Finally, crafting a plan for the future will not only help alleviate the issues above during the next drought, they will also help the state survive as droughts and water conditions continue to get worse. California's water troubles are certainly a top priority for its leaders, and hopefully it is well on its way to implementing solutions so that the next drought does not develop the same problems as the last one.

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