CHANGING THE RULES

The Transformative Power of Ballot Initiatives
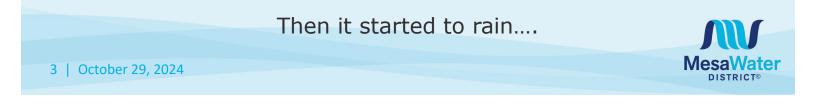

The Water Infrastructure Funding Act

- Allocates 2% General Fund for water supply projects
- Allows 50% of allocation to pay financing
- Funding expires only after 5 MAF/year *new* water supply
- Eligible projects include everything
- Redefined "beneficial use" to include people
- Major reforms to environmentalist regulations

What Happened?

- Promising initial support, but huge undertaking
- Big players used it as leverage
- Environmental groups lined up universally opposed
    - Desalination and reservoirs were non-starters
    - Changing CEQA was non-starter
- Polling unfavorable if perception of environmental harm

Then it started to rain….

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Lessons Learned

- Need iterative process with donors and multiple polls
- Must line up major donors in advance
- New potential coalition partners
    - Moderate democrats
    - Environmental justice community
- Must be positioned as unequivocally good for environment

- Initiatives are tough - prudent to consider other approaches

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Current Messages

- Abundant water and energy is feasible and sustainable

- Reasonable environmentalism is compatible with abundance

- All-of-the-above water project types guarantee resilience

- Gov't and private sector funds – local rate base not enough

- Urban and rural water agencies must unite

Current New Policy Ideas

- Need solution that minimizes opposition and attracts near universal support from water community

- *Elements of new policy agenda:*
  - Fish friendly delta diversions
  - Brackish water desalination
  - Wastewater reuse – especially for coastal cities
  - Politically popular power sources (solar)
  - More moderate but meaningful CEQA reform
  - Pressure for people-friendly oversight of state water agencies

Current Target Audience

- Water agencies – federal, state, regional, urban and rural

- Other water interests – industry, ag, civil, contractors

- Other - journalists, politicians, activists, influencers, donors

- Energy interests – all sectors, industry, utilities, innovators

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Current Communications

- Weekly Email Newsletter on Water & Energy Topics
  - Published every week since July 2023 (41% open)
  - Linked in Mavens Notebook, archived on our websites
  - Adding graphic videos in 2025

- Other Articles: City Journal, National Review, Real Clear Politics, OC Register, Ag Alert, Cal Matters, and more

- Presentations: CalDesal, Kern Water Summit, and more

- Policy Paper "Achieving Water Abundance"

New Ballot Initiative – Basic Requirements

- Amendment requires 874,641 signatures (8%)
- Statute requires 546,651 signatures (5%)
  (% of gubernatorial votes in last election)

- To allow for duplicate and invalid signatures, actual number required 30% greater, i.e., 1.1M & 700,000

- Filing must be 14 months prior to November election
- Cost to gather signatures $8M (or more)

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New Ballot Initiative - Timeline

- Allow about a year prior to filing for coalition building, major donor support, polling and legal research

  - 8/26/25   File final text to Attorney General
  - 11/01/25 Get Title & Summary, begin signature gathering
  - 4/29/26   Deadline to turn in signed petitions – 180 days
  - 6/30/26   Certification by Secretary of State – 38 days (must be 4 months prior to election day)

- 11/03/26   General Election

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New Ballot Initiative - Budget

- Legal work to prepare text – $50K
- Petition printing and shipping – $250K
- Polling – $100K
- Website, treasurer, ongoing legal – $150K
- Signature gathering, direct mail, signature verification - $7.5M
- Total cost to qualify for ballot – $8M (probably best case)

- Cost to run general election campaign – $10M/$50M

Goals

- Deeper understanding among politicians, journalists, activists, experts and voters: Abundance is achievable

- *Consensus between urban and rural agencies: Must unite behind regulatory reform and practical investments*

- Explore and share innovative alternative approaches
  - One page downloadable initiative
  - Lawfare