

Guest Editorial: Apple Valley water takeover plan: Know the full cost

By: Jon Coupal
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In addition to our unrelenting defense of Proposition 13, the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association also protects homeowners from unreasonable costs for property related services, like sewer, water and refuse collection. Currently, we have concerns about the proposal by the Apple Valley Town Council to exercise the power of "eminent domain" to take over a privately owned water company.

Let's be clear. There is nothing inherently wrong with public ownership of water service. In fact, most Californians get their water from public providers. But when government takes over an already existing private water provider, the projected costs are invariably understated and ratepayers soon experience sticker shock.

What is happening in Apple Valley strikes us as eerily similar to the politicians' promises for California's high-speed rail project from Los Angeles to San Francisco. In exchange for the initial passage of \$9 billion in bonds, California voters were promised many things, most of which we now know are not true. For example, the promised \$33 billion project is now estimated to cost well above of \$100 billion, it is not high speed, and does not go from Los Angeles to San Francisco. And even though everyone now agrees that the initial promises were false, the same politicians who were so very wrong in their promises to all of us refuse to stop the project.

But one need not look very far to see an even more compelling reason for caution. Right here in San Bernardino County, residents of Big Bear learned the hard way not to trust everything politicians promised. There too, local politicians promised their residents rate reductions for their water. The opposite proved to be true. The cost of service did not go down; because salary, maintenance, and water costs almost always rise and those costs added to the cost of compensating the private property owned for their "taken" property led to greater costs to the customer.

As a statewide organization, we've seen these government takeovers before in other parts of California and they are bad news. In fact, we cannot find a single instance where the eminent domain takeover of a major water system delivered the promised financial benefits. This is true for the community of Felton in Santa Cruz County and for the City of Ojai in Ventura County.

As consumers of government services, citizens of Apple Valley need to know the true cost of the proposed takeover. And by "true cost" we don't mean some made up low-balled number. Either way, homeowners should be prepared for substantially higher costs in future years. After all, this is government we're talking about.

Jon Coupal is president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, California's largest grass-roots taxpayer organization dedicated to the protection of Proposition 13 and the advancement of taxpayers' rights.

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