

# MERCED SUN-STAR

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## OUR VIEW

# Water-saving bills worth supporting

**State leaders must promote innovative ways to offset new water demand.**

California is no stranger to drought, though collective memory tends to recede in wet years. During the droughts of 1976-1977 and 1987-1992, Californians supported conservation measures.

And those helped lower the burden on water supplies that comes with new housing developments.

California is now in the third year of a drought, and the governor declared a statewide water emergency in February. It's time, once again, to push for improvements in conservation in new housing developments.

Without such measures, it will be increasingly difficult to meet water needs for a growing population. Many communities already are curtailing projects because they cannot find long-term supplies.

Two bills are working their way through the Legislature — one sponsored by the California Building Industry Association (Assembly Bill 300 by Assemblywoman Anna Caballero) and another sponsored by the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the California Planning and Conservation League (AB 1408 by Assemblyman Paul Kerkorian).

Both have elements that would encourage innovative approaches to reduce water consumption in new housing developments. They call for builders to use voluntary water-saving measures (irrigation control, efficient appliances, leak detection kits, automated metering, rainwater harvesting, water recycling) or pay into a conservation fund.

In return, developers would get credit for these savings by proving that their projects have a reliable supply.

AB 1408 is stronger in ensuring that the measures continue when the property is sold. Water suppliers must be able to count on water savings long-term. Modeled on a 700-home development in Contra Costa County, the bill also aims to have total water used after new development be equal to or less than total water used before the project.

California needs a comprehensive water solution. Meanwhile state leaders must promote innovative ways to offset new water demand, and the concepts in these bills are a good start.

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