



## Water for All Texans

**BY: JOE LEATHERS**

It's not news that more people are moving to Texas at a rapid pace. And why wouldn't they? For starters, the low cost of living, genuine people, beautiful landscapes and old-fashioned common sense make Texas a great place to live. And our state's relatively strong economy and ample business opportunities make it a great place to work. With all that Texas has going for it, it should come as no surprise that more people would want to make this place their home.

More people equal more mouths to feed, and that's a good thing for the Texas cattle industry. But more people also equal more resources consumed, particularly more water, and that's something the Texas Legislature must address.

In February, I had the opportunity to testify before the House Natural Resources Committee at the state capitol regarding water. The committee was considering legislation that would provide a long-term source of funding for the State Water Plan, which is the primary planning mechanism used to help local entities implement water projects like conservation, infrastructure and new technology. This plan is crucial to our state because it allows cities and towns, both urban and rural, to ensure their residents have water.

While at the capitol I heard over and over how urban areas must be the priority for water funding and infrastructure. I understand that.

Logically it makes sense to put those areas with the most people at the top of the list. However, the legislature must not overlook rural Texas.

Funding the state's water plan in a fair manner benefits all Texans. Those of us in rural areas want to see more people move to this state, and we realize that most of that growth will happen in the larger cities. But we in rural Texas provide the vast majority of urban Texans with the food they need to survive. To continue doing this, we need the support of the small towns that provide our industry with a workforce, schools for our children and a place for many of us to call home. If these areas are left to dry up, people will move, small towns will fade away and Texas agriculture will take a huge hit.

Case in point, there are 160 people in my hometown of Guthrie. The water in our area has always been high in nitrates, which means you can't drink it. For years, Guthrie residents have been provided with bottled water. Problem solved, right? You'd think so, but recently our area has been tasked with building a desalinization plant to make the water drinkable. If only the people in this area were to pay for this plant, the rate on every water meter would go up by approximately \$200 a month. In my town, \$200 a month extra per meter is a lot of extra money to come up with. If our project is included in the state's water

plan, than we might have help building the plant, which means more Guthrie residents will be able to pay their bills and stick around.

The point is we are all in this together. No person, city, town or industry can survive without water. The legislature must fund the State Water Plan and they must do so fairly, keeping both the growing cities and the small rural communities in mind.

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