

***Inland Valley Daily Bulletin***  
**Editorial: Ayala's plan looks good - 25 years later**  
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Longtime residents of the Inland Valley will remember that former state Sen. Ruben S. Ayala of Chino was the leading proponent for the Peripheral Canal before it was voted down in a state referendum in 1982.

Ayala was a quarter-century ahead of his time.

Now that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has expressed his support for the canal concept in a talk to farmers last week, the long-taboo subject is out in the open again.

Much of the water for Central and Southern California flows from the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, through a network of 19th-century earthen levees, and then is pumped into the California Aqueduct to be moved south.

The Delta is ecologically fragile, and also susceptible to devastation by earthquake because of those earthen levees. Farmers have long grown crops behind those levees, but the cropland has been sinking for decades and now lies far below the normal water level. If and when an earthquake causes some of the old levees to fail, flooding would ravage farms and ill-situated housing subdivisions and would mix saltwater from the San Francisco Bay with fresh water from the two rivers, knocking out water delivery to Central and Southern California for months, if not years.

Pumping water out of the Delta proves hazardous to many native species. A few weeks ago, the pumps were shut down for a week by court order because the pumps were killing the Delta smelt, a protected fish.

Back in 1980, Ayala and other legislators wanted to build a 43-mile canal to allow Sacramento River water to be diverted to the California Aqueduct before it reached the Delta. Opposition by environmentalists and some landowners culminated in political defeat for the plan after it became viewed by Northern Californians as a water grab by Southern Californians.

It was such a divisive subject that politicians shunned it altogether for a couple of decades thereafter.

But in the intervening years, the environmental problems for the Delta and its threatened species have only grown worse. And the seismic danger to the state's water delivery system has increased as the levees have aged - and has been highlighted by New Orleans' levee failure in Hurricane Katrina.

We said back in October that the \$4.1 billion in Proposition 1E, the bond measure voters approved the next month, would be better spent to build the canal than to patch crumbling levees. Now that option is looking to many in the state, including the governor, like the best way to solve the Delta's environmental and water-supply problems.

In September, Schwarzenegger signed an executive order for a comprehensive review of the Delta's ecosystem, assets and threats. In February, the Public Policy Institute of California published a report listing the Peripheral Canal as one of five strategies the state should consider for the Delta.

On June 4, the state Senate unanimously passed a bill by Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, that would require the state to choose a management strategy for the Delta by January, after it hears from the governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force.

State residents should be happy that our representatives have at last mustered the courage to take another look at Sen. Ayala's dream of a quarter-century ago.