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**Editorial: Water imperative; Wet January does not erase need for action**

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When Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger summoned legislators into a special session late last year to deal with California's looming water woes, the result was spectacularly unimpressive. Even as the state endured a lengthening drought, the Senate and Assembly mainly ignored Schwarzenegger's call for action and ultimately left Sacramento without accomplishing a thing.

Then came a post-Christmas wave of winter storms, which abruptly propelled California's snowpack to 111 percent of average for this time of year. Even better, from San Diego's perspective, snowfall in the Colorado River basin surged to 115 percent of normal.

So, the crisis is over, right? No need for the Legislature to bother itself with the water problem, right?

Senate President Don Perata, D-Oakland, certainly seems to think the urgent need for legislative action has suddenly vanished. "We probably just want to hold our dice," he declares. Assembly Republican leader Michael Villines of Fresno expresses similar relief, stressing that dealing with the water issue in the Legislature is, after all, "a very tough sell."

Wait just a minute. Is one brief bout of wet weather all it takes for the Legislature to duck this pressing issue yet again? Can anyone credibly claim that the state's water worries have evaporated all because of one wet week?

The truth is, the imperative for California to boost its storage capacity, generate new supplies and implement sensible conservation measures is greater than ever. Legislators are merely deluding themselves, and no one else, if they believe several feet of fresh snow in the last few days has resolved the water dilemma.

California's population will continue to grow for the foreseeable span. This will steadily boost water demand indefinitely. Meantime, scientists believe climate change will mean that, in the decades ahead, semi-arid but heavily populated Southern California will receive even less rainfall than today, while the far northern reaches of the state will receive more rainfall than today. Because of global warming, the Sierra snowpack will be diminished, reducing its natural storage capacity.

As a consequence of all of these factors, California must significantly increase its storage capacity – underground and in reservoirs – in order to capture rainfall that once was stored naturally as snowpack. Gov. Schwarzenegger rightly underscored this reality in his State of the State speech yesterday. Yet the Legislature thus far has spurned his plan for at least two large new reservoirs and increased underground storage, along with improvements in the Bay-Delta to capture more runoff and ship it to where it is needed. The Democratic majorities in the Senate and Assembly have been unwilling to cross environmental hard-liners who oppose increased water infrastructure and believe instead that Draconian conservation measures are all that are needed.

California's water problems will only grow to crisis proportions if legislative leaders continue to pretend they don't exist.