

# The Legislative Perspective on Funding the State Water Plan

Andy Nuñez, Chair, Water & Natural Resources Committee

*Andy was born and raised on the family ranch in Roswell, New Mexico. He is one of 11 children, seven boys and four girls. Six boys served in the military; the youngest was killed in Vietnam. Andy served three years in the US Marine Corps from 1953 to 1956. In 1957, he entered New Mexico State University on the GI Bill and received bachelor's and master's degrees. Andy went to work for the US Department of Agriculture for seven years in the Gallup area. He then returned to NMSU to work in the International Program office for seven years traveling to Mexico and Central and South America. Subsequently, Andy left NMSU and took a position in Puerto Rico on a two-year contract to establish a Farm Bureau organization. Upon returning to New Mexico, he started farming and ranching in the Roswell area until 1986 when he bought a farm in Hatch. In 1990, Andy started working for the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau as Organizational Director and Lobbyist. In 1992, he was hired by NMSU as Legislative Liaison and General Director including roles as Area Director for Extension, Director of the Rural Agricultural Improvement and Public Affairs Project, and International Program Director. He remained in this position until 2000 when he won the election as State Representative.*



**G**ood morning all and thank you for having me here. My talk will be shorter than my introduction. I don't want to repeat what Angela Bordegaray talked about this morning but a lot of what she said is what I have on my prepared notes.

My topic today is a legislator's perspective on funding the State Water Plan. There is no money. See how short this talk was? In 1987, the legislature recognized the need to establish a statewide water plan but we have been remiss in funding the requirements for such a plan. It is another one of those unfunded mandates but I haven't been responsible for that because in every legislative session I have introduced bills to secure money and I will continue to do so. A lot of my friends in Santa Fe who serve on the legislature with me do not realize how important water is to the state of New Mexico. In my estimation, water is the

biggest problem – or a lack of water – is the biggest problem that we have in the state. We must get a handle on how much water we have and that's the job of the State Engineer and he is working on it. But the legislature needs to fund the plan; we need to fund the agencies involved in this work, and I know that Angela Bordegaray and Gretel Follingstad have been working hard with very little funding. This year we again will introduce legislation to appropriate funds for these agencies.

Water plans are extremely important; the budget deficit is bad, but if we ever get in a water deficit, we will be in worse shape than we would be with a budget deficit. As chairman of the Agriculture and Water Committee and as chairman of the Interim Water and Natural Resources Committee, I am committed to making sure that our water programs in the state of New Mexico are properly funded

and taken care of. I will be introducing legislation and will have Estefan Lopez from the Interstate Stream Commission provide me some figures by November 30 for the final meeting of our Water and Natural Resources Committee about what will be needed. And even though we have no money supposedly, we are going into a Special Session on Saturday where we should learn how much money we really do have. There a lot of places where we could cut funding. It doesn't make sense to me that I go in and request \$50,000-\$100,000 from the total state budget, which is nothing, and for something as important as water, and I can't get even that much money to fund projects. We must keep our legislators informed on the importance of water. That is what I'll be working on this coming year. As I said, the amount that we request is a very small amount in the total budget. We could eliminate one of the governor's staff positions in order to pay for it. I know several people we could go ahead and eliminate and thereby have funds for a lot of bills, but don't tell the governor I said that. We will be in Santa Fe on Saturday debating what we are going to do. At this point, the legislators have given the governor three options and he has rejected all three of them.

In my estimation, and I may lose some votes for this but I didn't come in here to please everybody anyway, everyone is going to have to take a cut: education, Medicaid, everyone. If we don't cut everybody a little, then those who are left will really be hit hard. I am a firm believer that if the administration doesn't come up with a plan where everybody gets hit some, I won't vote for it. I will be sticking with that notion and we will see how it goes this weekend. We have no idea how long we will be in the Special Session, but rest assured that I will be sticking by the water issues hoping we get some money for them. Water has been a target for cuts for a long time.

We also need to get money for the Utton Transboundary Resource Center's Joe M. Stell Water Ombudsman Program. The Center's staff is helping people who are going through adjudications, and we need to help Susan Kelly from the Center get funding to keep that going. The program is named for Joe Stell who will be your speaker at lunchtime. To me, Joe Stell is the most knowledgeable man in water in the state of New Mexico. In my estimation he knows more about water than any two people in the state, but we will talk about him at lunchtime.

The State Water Plan and the regional water plans are living documents and they need to be updated and kept current. The State Water Plan is up for renewal and updating every five years and hopefully we will get the money for that this coming year. Angela Bordegaray and the rest of the staff cannot introduce the bill to the legislature because the governor has said that you cannot introduce bills if you are on his cabinet. However, they can direct me and I can introduce the bill. If anyone has any questions, I will be willing to answer them.