

GUEST COLUMN:

Las Vegas pipeline outcome offers new opportunity

By Chris Giunchigliani

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Rural and urban Nevada can both rest a little easier now that the massive pipeline project is not at the forefront of the Southern Nevada Water Authority's plans.

But there is still plenty of work to do to protect and expand the water supply in Las Vegas while doing the same in rural parts of the state.

As the nation's driest state, we must ensure that our decisions in one region don't harm another.

For many years, that has not been the case.

I was overcome with joy when I recently learned that the SNWA would not appeal a recent district court ruling denying vital water rights applications for the project in four rural valleys.

Years ago, when I served on the SNWA board of directors, I was vehemently concerned about the legality, economics and viability of the Las Vegas pipeline.

The end to this legal battle is good news for rural and metropolitan Nevada alike.

The project is an outdated, costly vision dreamed up at a time before terms like climate change and urban sprawl were in the lingua franca of Las Vegas residents.

It pitted our communities against one another. Yet it guaranteed major financial, cultural and ecological sacrifices for remote communities, tribes and our urban core.

For many of the current SNWA board members, the pipeline is an inherited problem that offered a choice about how to prepare for the coming decades — looking northward to rural Nevada or looking westward to California.

SNWA General Manager John Entsminger, along with Clark County commissioners Marilyn Kirkpatrick, Justin Jones and others on the SNWA board, are leading modernized efforts to ensure a steady water supply to the fastest-warming city in the nation's driest state. And fortunately, for now, they want to look west.

SNWA is pursuing collaborations with Metropolitan Water District to trade shares of California water behind Hoover Dam in return for infrastructure investments made by Southern Nevadans in their community. This is the way of the future.

There will also be a doubling down on conservation.

More than 60% of water used in our community is expended outdoors. That means it cannot be treated and recycled to bolster our small share of the Colorado River via return flow credits.

Removing turf, covering swimming pools and accounting for every drop we use is vital for the long-term sustainability of Southern Nevada. Despite the good legal news and commitments, more work must be done to ensure that there won't be a revival of a rural water grab in the future.

The SNWA maintains applications to pump more than 60 billion gallons of water annually in rural valleys that are close to Great Basin National Park and Death Valley National Park.

It also maintains an application with the Bureau of Land Management for the pipeline's right of way and will continue owning and operating seven ranches in Spring Valley.

SNWA must revoke the applications to help guarantee that it won't look north anytime soon. Rural Nevada's water must not be an insurance policy that underwrites water waste in Southern Nevada.

As a board member for the Great Basin Water Network, my colleagues and I are humbled to see that SNWA is focusing on conservation and Colorado River collaboration.

The network has been urging that all along during the 31-year fight to stop the pipeline from draining rural Nevada and indebting Southern Nevada to a more than \$15 billion project.

With climate change and continued quarreling among the seven states dependent on the Colorado River, we must unite as one Nevada to defend our most precious resource.

What's good for the goose should be good for the gander.

Chris Giunchigliani served in the Nevada Legislature as an assemblywoman from 1990-2006, and as a Clark County commissioner for 12 years. She is a member of the Sierra Club and a board member of Great Basin Water Network.