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Look out, California. More meaningless water restrictions are on their way

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["You never let a serious crisis go to waste."](#)

The now famous quote by President Obama's first Chief of Staff, Rahm Emmanuel, is a tried-and-true tactic for politicians seeking to take advantage of a situation and pass laws to further an extreme agenda that wouldn't otherwise be possible. Unfortunately for us, nowhere in the United States is this more evident than in California. The recent drought is the latest crisis being used to justify further government control over our lives. A few weeks ago, Gov. Brown quietly signed two bills that will set some of the most stringent water use standards in the country and will have implications for Californians for decades to come.

Never mind that communities have already made huge [conservation efforts across the state since the mid-90s](#). Under the new laws, state regulators will now have a heavy hand in every decision made by local water agencies. To those who have followed politics for a long time, it should come as no surprise that liberal politicians in Sacramento just used California's record drought as an excuse to pass draconian water restrictions.

During the height of the drought, the state passed "emergency" conservation regulations that called on Californians to dramatically reduce their water use. At the time, we were told they would be temporary due to the unprecedented drought. However, just over a year after the drought officially ended, Brown and the state Legislature decided that it would be better to effectively make the restrictions permanent and passed [Assembly Bill 1668](#) and [Senate Bill 606](#), which authorize fines of up to \$10,000 per day for violations. I should note that our local Assemblyman Jordan Cunningham voted no while our state Sen. Bill Monning supported the bills.

We can all agree that water conservation is important, particularly in our region where water is scarce. That's why our local water agencies have

already taken significant steps to reduce water use so they can meet the demand for water from our community. They have a strong incentive to conserve on their own and don't need Sacramento to tell them what to do.

The two bills signed by Gov. Brown instead embrace a top-down approach from the state which makes little to no sense and will be unnecessarily costly to Californians. The new laws call for reducing indoor water use to 55 gallons per person daily as the standard for indoor residential water use [by 2022 and 50 gallons per day per person by 2030](#). Each local water agency will need to get approval from the state on their plans to meet the targeted reductions. Sound bad? Just wait it gets better.

It's not just indoor water use that will be affected. A yet to be developed formula will allow the state to dictate how much outdoor water each community can use based on their geographic climate. Given the state's not-so-stellar record at accommodating unique local circumstances, this will be a recipe for disaster.

All of this means that local districts will likely have to develop expensive rebate programs to purchase new appliances and remove lawns to get their customers to reduce water use. Another byproduct will certainly lead to limited watering days and other restrictions with these costs passed on to consumers. And for what benefit?

An analysis by California Policy Center estimates that when fully implemented, the new conservation laws would [only save 537,000 acre feet of water per year](#) statewide, which is about a quarter of the water that San Luis Reservoir holds or put another way, less than 1 percent of California's total water diversions for environmental, agricultural and urban uses. The same analysis estimates that based on current consumption rates and accounting for the fact that many of the cheaper conservation strategies have already been implemented, it will cost tens of billions of dollars in retrofits to meet the new standards.

All this to say that there will be limited benefits and huge costs for these new laws. It will also greatly increase the power that the state has over our most vital resource.

Local water agencies know conservation is important and already take steps on their own to reduce water use. What this really is about is using the drought as an excuse to increase the power of state government.

Rahm Emmanuel would be proud to see that Gov. Brown and the state Legislature didn't let this crisis go to waste.

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