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EDITORIAL

EAA rule change is threat to economy

The Edwards Aquifer Authority's recent vote to "clarify" the rules regarding the conversion of base irrigation groundwater rights to unrestricted groundwater poses a clear threat to the vitality of Uvalde County's economy. The simple reason is that irrigated farm land without water rights is far less valuable, not only in terms of taxable value but also because of diminished production, ie. lost wages and purchases of farm equipment, fertilizer, herbicides and other supplies.

Senate Bill 1477, which created the EAA, stipulated that irrigators who could prove historical use would receive a permit for 2 acre feet of Edwards water. As an example, if you owned 100 acres, you could pump 200-acre feet of water annually. The law further specified that permit holders could sell or lease half of those water rights, but the last acre foot, the Base Irrigation Groundwater (BIG), must remain with the land.

The fear was (and still is) that if landowners could sell all of their permitted water they might be inclined to do so, thus leaving behind a greatly diminished resource. Of course, lawmakers were cognizant of the fact that under some unusual circumstances, once irrigated land might no longer be viable, such as in the case of development for other purposes. Rules were put in place to address that eventuality.

Last month EAA directors, including Uvalde County representative Rader Gilleland, voted to make it easier for the last acre foot to be sold, transferred, leased or otherwise severed from the land. (The county's other representative Don Laffere voted against the change.) EAA chairman Luana Buckner proffered in a letter that appeared in last Sunday's Leader-News that nothing has changed, that the board action was simply a "clarification" of a rule that has existed since 2001 regarding the treatment of BIG.

However, the amended EAA rule allows a landowner to show only one piece of evidence as to why historically irrigated land is no longer practicable to farm instead of the two limitations set forth in the original rule, and the time period required for irrigated land not to have been farmed has been shortened from five years to three years. But nothing has changed.

In the meantime, the Uvalde County Underground Water Conservation District, Uvalde County and the city of Uvalde have joined forces to challenge EAA's authority to alter rules set forth by Senate Bill 1477.

In short, the legislation that created the EAA did not empower the entity to alter the intent of the law, which was to keep a base acre foot of groundwater with the land.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Water economy

I'd like to respond about the ongoing discussions and possible actions regarding the rule change by the EAA board of directors concerning Base Irrigation Groundwater (BIG).

First off, I am all for property rights of the landowner, however the Texas Legislature created the EAA with the stipulation of leaving half of the permitted base with the land to protect the Ag economy in the rural counties.

That however has been eroding ever since the current EAA was created in 1996 by the Texas Legislature. Now comes along another "rule change" that will further erode available water for Uvalde County agriculture.

In Uvalde County, water equals jobs and to give the reader a perspective on this I'd like to review some past and present history of Uvalde County agriculture.

Twenty-five years ago, before the EAA act was passed, the agriculture industry was booming and we were truly the Winter Garden. Twenty-five

years ago there were several produce sheds/frozen food plant, cotton gin and grain dealers. To support all that, the implement dealers provided tractors and harvest equipment; they are now relegated to selling ATV's to deer hunters.

There were several fuel dealers, seed sales/production, chemical companies, irrigation providers and a host of support industries to keep the Ag economic machine running.

These all provided jobs and, as we know, it all started with the water. Without water, the ag economic machine stops running. I was told long ago when I got my ag-economics degree that an ag dollar turns over seven times and it fuels a local economy in several ways such as bank accounts, housing, retail sales and investment growth.

Now get in your car and drive out to the area farms. You will see idle land. The remaining produce sheds are having a hard time getting outside growers. Chemical companies are down to one. Fuel companies are downsizing or deciding to hang

it up, and on and on. When you take away the water, you take away jobs and affect the local economy. Thank goodness that Uvalde County's economy is diversified, or we'd be in a world of hurt.

Now here is a tale of two towns.

Down south in Batesville, where the water is staying with the land, things are hopping. They have two cotton gins that will probably exceed 140,000 bales this season. A new produce shed just started up and with the spinach, cabbage and other crops, they are producing jobs and support industry; they are the Winter Garden that Uvalde once was. It's all about the water.

In closing I believe the EAA is overstepping its bounds by enacting this new rule. It should be addressed by the Texas Legislature which set the system in place that we abide by. These changes not only affect Uvalde County but set a precedence for the whole state.

Water means life, jobs, and the economics of a community.

Don Laffere
EAA District 14 director

PASTOR'S COLUMN

Peyton: What is an epiphany?

Epiphany. Have you had a recent epiphany? In the world today when someone comes to a new understanding, they say they have had an epiphany. Well, that is not really how the word epiphany should be used.



STEVE PEYTON

Dictionary.com uses this definition: a Christian festival, observed on January 6, commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles in the persons of the Magi; Twelfth-day.

As we see, the primary definition has to do with Jesus. Have you seen Jesus? Do you know Jesus? I can truly say that I see the manifestation of Jesus in my life of faith in God and in the actions of people I am surrounded. I see the people of this community who are the "hands and feet of Christ" into the community. Living with and loving others as Christ loves them.

That is an epiphany. Well done good and faithful servants.

THE REV. Steve Peyton is pastor of First United Methodist Church of Uvalde.

Write to us!

LETTERS TO the editor are welcome. Letters must include mailing address and telephone number. Letters should not exceed 500 words and are limited to one per month.

PLEASE SEND LETTERS TO:
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Rambie: God will see widows, widowers through grief

Recently I received a phone call from a woman whose world was suddenly turned upside down. "Kathleen, this is Susie," she stated. "I need your help."

"Susie, is everything okay?" I asked.

"No, Bill is dead. He was traveling and I received a phone call that he col-

lapsed and he is gone," she said in a state of shock.

"No." I responded with a loud voice. I did not want anyone to experience the pain I had experienced as a widow.



KATHLEEN RAMBIE

Since that day when my friend called for help, I have had numerous other acquaintances that have lost their mate. I hate it for all of them and my heart is tender towards them.

None of us have any guarantees in life. Bad things happen to good people, and it is in our broken places that God's love, grace and hope peeks

in to see us through the pain of life. In the meantime, we all have our place in history.

For some of us, it is to push through with all we have in us to live life again. For others, we have a mandate that is the basics of Christianity to help those that are in distress or hurting.

If you are a widow or

widower, take heart. There are some wonderful promises in scripture. If you have not, you have a wonderful opportunity to practice the basics of Christianity, "look after the fatherless and the widow in their distress." James 1:27 (NIV)

Widows and widowers are dear to the heart of God. It is easy to feel

alone, lonely, and wonder where you fit, now that you are no longer married. All these feelings are natural as part of you, is now gone. Scripture says that when we marry, we become one; therefore, when a mate leaves this earth, part of you is missing. The unwanted jour-

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