

SEIZE THE DAY

The Legislature has passed the most significant water legislation in recent memory. House Bill 1483 states what out-of-state applicants must clear before their applications can be approved, providing Oklahomans priority on using Oklahoma water. It establishes legal arguments for negating the Tarrant County and Hugo/Irving, Texas, lawsuits against Oklahoma and directs the Legislature to approve out-of-state sales.

The bill also raises questions. Do we treat Oklahoma water as a resource and use it for ourselves, then sell some to others, pocketing millions for developing our own infrastructure? Or do we pass laws to squirrel it away for — well, I'm not sure for what. The Tarrant County lawsuit goes to court in December. If the Texans win the lawsuit, we may have to answer these questions sooner rather than later.

Water is a resource to be developed and used. Oklahomans are blessed to have plentiful water supplies. Unfortunately, our water isn't evenly distributed. That's the part of the equation we need to fix; we can fix it with money others will pay for our surplus water.

This scenario must be a focal point of the Oklahoma Water Plan, now being revised. The State Chamber applauds lawmakers for taking this first step. HB 1483 points us down the right path. Now we need to seize the day and determine our own destiny.

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