

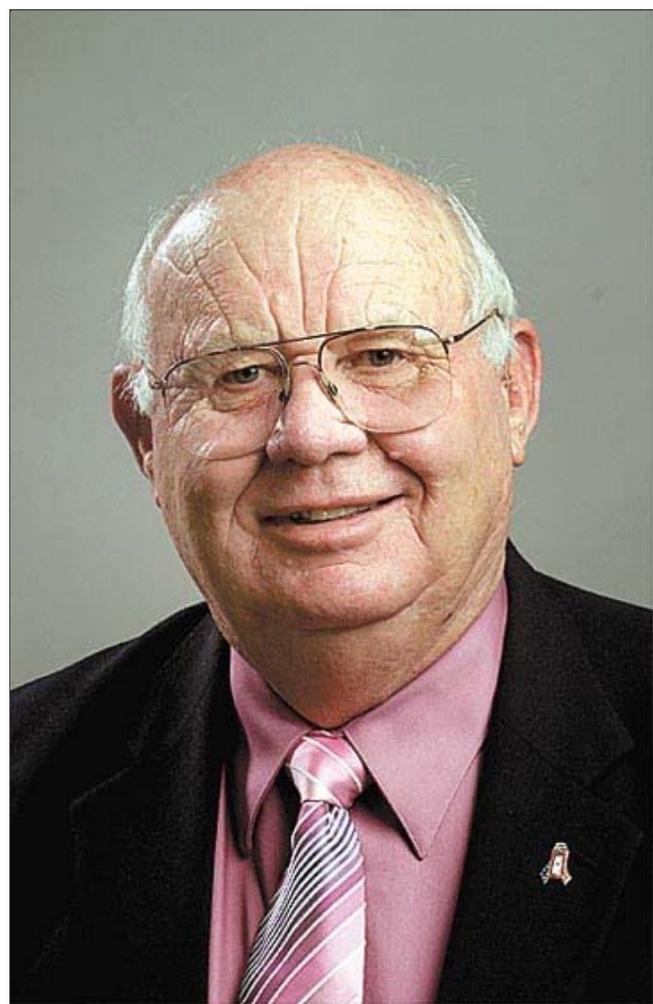
CALIFORNIA'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER - EST. 1851

# Mountain Democrat



## My turn: EID board president responds to Akin column

By George Wheeldon | EID Board president | March 18, 2009 14:57



In response to Richard Akin's "My turn" column (Mountain Democrat, March 9), I want to address his main allegation - that the El Dorado Irrigation District unfairly charges customers based on whether they receive pumped or gravity-fed water.

I disagree with Mr. Akin's notion and explain why below. But first I must set the record straight. Contrary to Mr. Akin's assertion, the EID board did not vote on Jan. 20 to merge the existing pumped and gravity rates and create a blended rate. That idea is one of many we will discuss at our March 23 public meeting, when we will examine the facts and hear what our customers have to say before we make a decision.

As for his allegation, Mr. Akin uses an old tactic of pitting some parts of the district against others. My view is that we're one district with well-integrated facilities and systems that operate as cost-efficiently as possible. If we start making distinctions, where do we stop Should customers in Sierra Springs pay less for their water than someone in Diamond Springs because they're closer to Sly Park Should El Dorado Hills pay anything at all for Sly Park No utility operates that way. PG&E doesn't set

a higher rate for customers who are 10 miles from a substation than for someone who lives a mile away.

We have customers all over the district who are on pumped rates, not just in El Dorado Hills. And customers throughout our entire service area may receive pumped water one day and gravity-fed water the next, precisely because we are an integrated system where we can transfer water as needed and to save on operating costs.

Speaking of costs, Mr. Akin throws out all kinds of dollar amounts he says are associated with pumped water and then writes there is "zero operational cost" to the delivery of gravity-fed water through the Camino Conduit and El Dorado Main No. 1. That's silly. I can't think of anywhere in our

integrated system - including the Camino Conduit and El Dorado Main - where operational costs are “zero.”

This is another attempt to stir up east-versus-west, us-against-them hard feelings, and it is unproductive, to say the least.

Let’s look at what happens if the board decides to drop the existing pumped and gravity rates and adopt a blended rate. Take a residential customer who uses 1,800 cubic feet of water every two months. That’s low, but not uncommon for many small households with little turf in their landscapes. Under the existing gravity rate, the two-month bill is \$44.40, and under the existing pumped rate, it’s \$46.14. Under the proposed blended rate, the bill would be \$37.03. In other words, customers on gravity and pumped rates who use 1,800 cubic feet of water every two months would all pay less with a blended rate in place. Even if the proposed stage 1 drought charges were applied, the bill would still be lower - at \$40.72 - than under both the gravity and pumped rates.

Now take a residential customer who uses 3,000 cubic feet every two months, which is about average across our service area. The two-month gravity rate bill is \$54.02, and the pumped rate bill is \$57.08. The blended rate bill would be lower than both at \$51. Adding the proposed stage 1 drought charges would increase the bill to \$56.86, a little more than the gravity rate and a little less than the pumped rate.

So the average residential customer’s bill drops - or remains about the same if a stage 1 drought is declared - under the blended rate.

The proposed new rate schedule was designed to give customers more control over their bills. It reduces the bimonthly basic fee in most cases and charges more in three tiers as water use goes up. The more a customer can conserve, the less the customer pays.

That is not the impression readers may get from Mr. Akin’s column, and I can understand his concerns. Customers with large lots or acreages, like Mr. Akin, will likely see increases in their bills unless they step up their water conservation efforts. Water-thrifty customers will see their bills go down.

I also take exception to the insult Mr. Akin aims at our field staff. As a former EID board member, he may recall how upset customers become, and I don’t blame them, when a problem crops up and is not dealt with promptly. All those “EID pickups running around tinkering, adjusting and lubricating, etc.”- as Mr. Akin wrote - is actually smart maintenance, helping to prevent future trouble. As the saying goes, you can pay me now or pay me later.

I do agree with Mr. Akin on one point. Like him, I encourage readers to keep March 23 in mind. That’s the day of our public hearing on the proposed rate structure. The meeting starts at 6 p.m. in the EID headquarters building, 2890 Mosquito Road, Placerville. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these and other issues with our customers.

George Wheeldon is president of the El Dorado Irrigation District Board of Directors.

The Mountain Democrat Newspaper is published Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday by Mountain Democrat Inc.

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