

Talk Isn't Filling State's Water Needs

GOV. George Nigh is inviting people "to share in seeking creative alternatives in addressing Oklahoma's water issues of importance" at a conference set for Tuesday, Dec. 1, at Lincoln Plaza Center.

The event is sponsored by more than 30 organizations and agencies and is coordinated by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. It features an array of noted authorities on water as speakers and invites others attending to participate in discussions.

The all-day program is well organized and undoubtedly many wise observations and practicable suggestions will be made for assuring our state a continuing adequate supply of water for all purposes.

There may be some disagreement but, based upon what has happened in prior water conferences, most of those present will agree that Oklahoma has a lot of water, much of it is wasted, we need to conserve it and transfer surpluses to areas where they may be used.

And based upon what the legislature has not done in prior years, the

entire conference may be expected to dissolve into nothing more meaningful to our lawmakers than a whirlwind when it comes to a showdown in appropriating funds for water or for other purposes.

Because public concern over water supplies subsides when copious fall rains break the summer drought, demand for action on water issues is pretty weak by the time the legislature is in session.

Other groups send delegations to the capitol but seldom do water supporters show up in numbers. Legislators claim they do not react to such pressures but they seem to hear voters shouting whenever teachers, road boosters, union labor and similar groups turn on the heat.

Water users don't apply much pressure. When rationing is lifted from some 400 towns that run dry in summer, when car washing and lawn watering is allowed again, and when stories of occasional flooding appear in newspapers, water supply problems are shoved aside.

The result is that little more than token action has been taken by the legislature.

In 1974, Senate Bill 510 authorized the development of the Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan and funded its initial phase. The first report was published in 1975, covering 33 southern counties.

Since then other reports have been published, giving detailed information on present and future water requirements of Oklahoma, and proposals for supplying these needs. The legislature has done little or nothing to implement the proposals.

The latest report on the Comprehensive Water Plan consists of about 250 pages, complete with maps, charts, tables and facts. Probably all legislators have thumbed through it but how many have studied it?

For decades we have been conditioned to proposing projects and calling on Uncle Sam to pay for their construction. In the future we may have to depend more heavily upon our own resources.

The Legislature has been spending money like it was water. It is time to start conserving and using our water like it is money!