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## ***SQ 558 Will Start Water Flowing***

**O**KLAHOMA has ample water resources, but our systems for getting it from where it is to where it is needed are deplorably inadequate.

That is why State Question 558, to be voted on in the November election, ought to be approved. It would make possible financing of many of the improvements that are imperative to assure cities, towns and many rural residents sufficient water supplies.

The tendency has been to look to Uncle Sam for grants and subsidies, but even some people in Washington seem to realize that government can't go on spending more than it takes in forever.

The trillion-dollar debt ceiling has resulted in moderate cuts in expenditures, and funds for water projects have been cut by about 50 percent. Federal subsidies won't do the job.

Many cities and towns have been stymied in growth and industrial development because of inadequate water. They can't vote on more bonds for more water until they be-

come stronger, and they aren't likely to become stronger until they solve their water woes.

There are nearly 1,100 community public water supplies in Oklahoma, owned or operated by municipalities, rural water districts, state facilities and private firms.

Only 36 of these systems serve greater than 10,000 population, but experts estimate that no more than half a dozen of these could meet state drinking-water standards.

Of the remainder, 850 are reported to serve less than 2,000 customers each. These have difficulty financing urgent improvements, which might include water sources, distribution lines, pumps, water treatment and sewage treatment.

Under the proposal, money would be advanced from bond sales by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board for approved projects. It would be repaid from revenues from the sale of water.

SQ 558 is not a measure to provide for tax increases. It is simply to authorize use of \$25 million already appropriated by the Legislature

from surplus state revenue to assist municipalities and water districts in obtaining financing not otherwise available.

The \$25 million will not be spent for this purpose, but it will be used as collateral or reserve to assure that no payments are missed on bonds issued for the water systems thus financed.

It is estimated that this guaranty fund would make possible upwards of \$200 million in water systems financing. Interest on the \$25 million could be used for emergency grants.

The reason for the referendum on SQ 558 is that questions were raised as to whether Oklahoma's budget-balancing amendment to the constitution would be violated. If the public votes to approve the financing plan, there will be no doubt it is OK.

Nobody claims that this would take care of all our water needs. This would cost billions. However, the provision for financing a number of moderate-sized projects in the state would help a lot to get our water resources flowing better.