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## Jerry Brown's water plan is more than policy

*In unveiling the latest version of the Peripheral Canal, the California governor is trying to finish what his father, Gov. Pat Brown, had started.*

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For Gov. Jerry Brown, his updated California water plan — the peripheral pipes — is not just bold policy, it's deeply personal.

It's not merely about his legacy, it's about his family's.

What his dad — the legendary builder Gov. Pat Brown — began more than half a century ago, the son now is adamantly committed to finishing.

The septuagenarian governor referred to his family's role in California water development when a reporter asked him last week whether he was biting off too much heading into the November election.

"It is really a very foolish game plan to always be trying to second-guess the electorate and hesitating to do what is needed," Brown responded somewhat disingenuously, since he is constantly mulling political possibilities and acting accordingly.

"This thing has been around for a long time. I can remember being in grammar school and my father was attorney general, fighting with Arizona over the Colorado River....

"[Water] is never going to be free from controversy and conflict, and in the midst of all that we have elections every four years. And somebody in my family is usually running. So I am not going to wait for that. I expect to have a lot more decisions, a lot more programs and a lot more elections before I get finished."

By my count, a Brown has been on a statewide ballot 33 times.

Here's a summary of the Brown family history on water:

In 1959, newly elected Gov. Pat Brown pushed the Legislature — and later the voters — into narrowly approving the bitterly controversial California Water Project to ship northern surplus to San Joaquin Valley irrigators and Los Angeles basin developers.

"We must build now and ask questions later," declared the governor's water director, Harvey Banks, in speeches up and down the state.

Some things never change. These days, the bullet train has inherited that build-now, ask-later mantra. Unlike the bullet train, however, the peripheral pipes — costing \$14 billion — would be paid for by their users, the water ratepayers.

Pat Brown had enough money to build the huge Oroville Dam on the Feather River and the California Aqueduct to deliver water south out of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

But he fell short of money and time to complete the project with a promised, although non-specific, "delta transfer facility." His administration ultimately chose a Peripheral Canal to funnel fresh Sacramento River water around the brackish delta and directly into the aqueduct. That was seen as the best way to protect salmon and striped bass from the fish-chomping pumps.

A prophetic 1966 Brown administration report warned that the "the canal must be operational by 1974" to "prevent great damage to the commercial and sport fisheries that are dependent on the delta."

Historically, the Sacramento-San Joaquin river system has been the second-largest salmon producer on the West Coast, runner-up only to the Columbia River.

But Gov. Ronald Reagan also ran into a financial bind and postponed building the canal.

Next up: Gov. Jerry Brown I. He embraced his father's project and persuaded the Legislature to authorize the canal. But an unlikely coalition of rich farmers — there wasn't enough water in it for them — and skittish environmentalists convinced voters to repeal the act.

That was 30 years ago. Since then, as Pat Brown predicted, the delta fishery has tanked. And courts have tightened the water valve to protect the vanishing fish — provoking howls from valley farmers and jitters among Southland interests. The delta water system is broken and unreliable.

Enter Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. In 2009, he coaxed through legislation creating a streamlined governing structure for the delta and paving the way for both ecological restoration and a newly designed peripheral canal — renamed a "conveyance" because by now "peripheral" had become a dirty word.

The legislation also included a \$11.1-billion bond issue that would help finance a dam or two and partially pay for the delta restoration. But the bond was so saturated with pork for other goodies that the Legislature has twice pulled it off the ballot.

Back to the present:

Gov. Jerry Brown II last week unveiled the latest version of the peripheral canal: tandem peripheral pipes. Or tunnels, as many call them.

There would be three giant intakes with fish screens punched through a levee just downriver from Sacramento carrying water into a large pool. From there, the water would flow by gravity through the two 33-foot-wide pipes beneath the delta to the southbound aqueduct.

There'd still be some pumping at the fish-killing plant, but about 80% less than currently.

The pipes' capacity would be 9,000 cubic feet of water per second. (Think one cubic foot as a basketball.) The current capacity at the pumps is 15,000 CFS. The previously proposed peripheral canal would have carried 25,000 CFS.

More perspective: When the Sacramento River system, including overflow bypasses, was roaring with Sierra snowmelt two springs ago, it was carrying 180,000 CFS. And during a 1997 flood rampage, the volume rose to 500,000.

But delta farmers and environmentalists know the state wouldn't be diverting fresh water only during peak runoffs. They don't trust the state and federal governments, corporate agriculture interests or Southern California.

They'll fight the governor, even if they're outgunned financially and politically.

Fire away, Brown says.

"At this stage, as I see many of my friends dying ... I want to get [stuff] done," the fourth-generation Californian told reporters, using an expletive. "And I'm going to get this done. All right? We are not going to sit here and twiddle our thumbs and stare at our navel."

There has been a lot of thumb-twiddling and navel-staring over water through the decades — none by a Brown.

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