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Cover photo: A view of the Milky Way over Phoinix Ranch in Jim Wells and Live Oak counties.

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Commentary: Texas Comptroller's Good for Texas Tour: Water Planning and Innovations

Glenn Hegar*¹

Editor-in-Chief's Note: The opinion expressed in this commentary is the opinion of the individual author and not the opinion of the Texas Water Journal or the Texas Water Resources Institute.

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¹ Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

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My job as the Texas comptroller of public accounts (comptroller) is to monitor and support the state's financial and economic well-being. I find that the best way, arguably the only way, to be successful in my position is to keep the interests of taxpayers top of mind. In my years as comptroller, I have prioritized face-to-face meetings with Texans and showcasing the work they do to make this state a great place to live and do business. I believe it's important to highlight not only how Texans shine during the good times but also how we deal with challenges.

My Good for Texas Tour series does just that: It gives me and my constituents a firsthand look at economic development opportunities and challenges that have statewide implications. Past tours have focused on topics like supply chains, cybersecurity, manufacturing, and more ([Statewide Economic Data n.d.](#)). This fall, I will be embarking on another Good for Texas Tour focused on water infrastructure, flood mitigation, innovative water solutions, and industries with a big stake in water, such as agriculture.

I am proud to say that I have a long history of advocating for and supporting our state's water planning initiatives, including the building of new infrastructure designed to conserve water and increase water supplies. I also am honored to have a seat on the board of advisors for the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas, a critical financial assistance tool for high-cost projects in Texas' state water plan ([State Water Implementation Fund for Texas 2022](#)). Speaking of long history, Texas and its residents have faced enormous weather-related challenges such as severe droughts over the years. The drought from 1950 to 1957, for instance, was one of the driest periods in Texas' modern history, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated that it resulted in almost \$40 billion (in 2021 dollars) in direct losses for the state's agriculture sector alone ([TWDB 2022](#)). The intense drought that occurred more recently, from 2011 to 2014, caused between \$11.1 billion and \$15.5 billion (also in 2021 dollars) in direct agricultural losses.

Unfortunately, we're experiencing drought conditions across the state right now, with nearly 60% of the state in extreme drought conditions and 20% in an exceptional drought, as measured by the federal government ([Current U.S. Drought Monitor Conditions for Texas 2022](#)). But our strong record of perseverance is why I firmly believe we'll meet this challenge head-on and position our state as the nation's leader in water planning and innovation.

On my upcoming water tour, I will have the pleasure of meeting and learning from Texans who turn water planning into action. This tour is timely for a slew of reasons. For one, the Texas Water Development Board released the latest state water plan earlier this year, and with our state rapidly growing in population and businesses continuing to move to Texas, we must be more diligent than ever to ensure we have the water

resources necessary for future generations ([TWDB 2021](#)). Additionally, the information we gather can help inform the 88th Legislature, which convenes just a few months from now. Legislative sessions are whirlwinds of activity, so up-to-date information about critical Texas water issues will help legislators as they craft policy during a hectic time.

In the June/July edition of Fiscal Notes, my office's flagship publication on the trends and events affecting our state's economy, we spotlighted the 2022 State Water Plan – Water for Texas and interviewed those intimately involved with the plan's development ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts 2022](#)). There's no getting around it: We have a long road ahead of us as we implement the strategies recommended in the state water plan. The adverse socioeconomic impacts of not meeting the state's water needs over the next 50 years are immense and overwhelming.

Even with formidable challenges in mind, I'm optimistic about the future of water management in our state. On my upcoming tour, I'm looking forward to learning from those who oversee successful projects, talking with experts, and hearing from regular Texans about the challenges they face. When all these stakeholders come together, meeting our state's water needs will be in excellent hands.

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