



## Insight Water

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If you Google the search term “water main break,” you get close to 6 million hits.

In the Washington area, the suburb of Potomac, Md., is dealing with a huge water main break that spewed water 50 feet in the air.

That is nothing compared to the water main break in Boston last month, which nearly created a panic for Red Sox fans everywhere.

Philly had a bad water main break, as did Los Angeles, Detroit, Muncie, Richmond, Hackensack, Atlanta, Cleveland, Stamford and Pittsburgh. Odds are that a water main broke at a town near you.

Water is one of those things that we all need to survive.

Earth is about 75 percent water, and muscles in the human body have about the same percentage, so without water, we are basically screwed.

Delivering water is an essential government responsibility. Governments that don't come up with an effective water allocation plan are completely useless and tend to collapse quickly.

When a water main breaks, it puts a tremendous strain on local governments, especially these days, when most of them are going broke anyway.

In the late 19th century, water was transported via lead pipes, but around the turn of the century copper piping was introduced and became the standard in the 1950s. Proving that Mr. McGuire was ahead of his time, by the 1970s plastic became the tubing of choice for most water districts.

Water wars are fairly commonplace in the West. After all, many big Western cities, places like Phoenix and Las Vegas, were built in deserts, places notable for their lack of water, and competition for the commodity can be intense on that side of the Mississippi.

Drinking water from a water bottle has become very popular, showing the immense power of marketing. Tap water is every bit as safe as drinking from a water bottle (maybe more so, especially if the bottle is made with Bishpenol A, or BPA), is a lot cheaper (free, vs. whatever the bottler charges) and is better for the environment (landfills are filling up with plastic water bottles). Yet the American public continues to consume billions of gallons of water from water bottles.

Water is one of those things that everyone assumes will be with us forever, but that is just not the case. History is replete with civilizations that died off when the water dried up.

To keep the water coming in the future, local, state and federal authorities are going to have to start to make

some tough decisions.

If pension and healthcare spending continues to expand and take up an increasingly large part of the local and state budgets, there will be no money to make future investments for water infrastructure. That means that more and more of these aging water systems are going to fall apart, straining the local budgets even more.

Local and state officials are going to turn to the federal government for help, but guess what? The feds are broke, too. The Obama administration has spent all the money on a wasteful stimulus bill that doesn't make the right long-term investments in water infrastructure, because all of those Obama projects needed to be shovel-ready. Making long-term investments in water projects takes, well, a long time. That means they aren't shovel-ready.

Throw in the money the president wasted on spending even more money on his dubious healthcare plan, and the out-year choices for the federal budget become even grimmer.

Local and state officials are going to be coming to Congress asking for earmarks. Republicans better start reformulating their opposition to earmarks, or they are going to have to start begging the Obama administration for federal money that, of course, the feds don't have anymore.

That means that at some point in time, state and local governments are going to either start raising taxes (or maybe user fees for those who use a lot of water) or cut spending on other government services (like education) or make some fundamental reforms on how they deal with pensions and healthcare for government employees. It is those entitlement costs that are killing budgets at all levels of government.

For me, I think it is crazy that somebody gets to retire at age 50 with a full pension and healthcare paid for, as many government employees do.

I think it is crazy that we give Medicare benefits to millionaires when we can't afford to pay our bills.

I think it is crazy that we don't raise the retirement age to 70.

We have some tough choices to make if we want to keep the water flowing for the next generation.

I don't get the sense that we are making those choices today.

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