

In Search of the Money Tree

The role of government in the water treatment industry



By Jerry Horner

Simply sit back and listen to hear the widespread cries for the government to assist nearly every type of business. This is especially applicable to those industries with significant funds available for local and/or federal campaign contributions. Nearly every segment of our economy is subsidized in some way by our tax dollars, or more accurately with borrowed dollars.

This not only includes energy, farming, education and transportation, but also our little corner of the world in the water improvement industry. It is ironic that a significant percentage of these allotments are provided to some of the wealthiest individuals and businesses. As one of the smallest fish in the pond, we have very little clout and will get trampled unless we can find avenues that allow us to conform, partner or simply hide.

Subsidies

Government subsidies come in many forms. Price supports, temporary or permanent disaster assistance, tariffs, low-cost loans and varying levels of protectionist legislation are examples. Used to influence supply, prices and life choices, subsidies are a tool employed at the behest of a few that negatively impact the masses.

The subsidy gravy train is not a magical one-way street, financed by a money tree or the Easter Bunny. Wrought with unexpected costs and consequences, this government aid often backfires, precipitating a ripple effect of deleterious and wasteful outcomes. U.S. sugar subsidies have resulted in higher prices, which may look good for the sugar producers, but cost jobs as American businesses dependent on sugar flee to countries with market prices. Low-cost loans encourage people to rebuild homes where fires, floods and storms regularly wipe out their property. Subsidies are typically a thoroughly inefficient, wasteful use of our funds.

Modest Beginnings

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is tasked with overseeing water resource management, primarily with regard to hydroelectric power generation, water storage, water diversion and water delivery. In the early 20th century,

with the modest goal of encouraging western migration by providing consistent irrigation water, the government began seeking and finding water projects to build. It did not take long for the Bureau of Reclamation to mutate from building cost-effective projects into a behemoth employing tens of thousands of administrative personnel, with a primary function of seeking out new projects, in part to justify its existence. It was not atypical for these projects to cost many times their most optimistic projections for benefits.

The Keynesian economist would argue that make-work projects like this assisted in recovery from the Great Depression, and continue to stimulate our present stagnant economy. Others would argue that spending money inefficiently, whether on water-related projects or any other segment of the economy, inherently robs from more fruitful market-driven projects.

No Lack of Need for Our Industry

Will the water improvement industry continue down the path of seeking to consort with our government to form partnerships that may or may not result in mutually beneficial results? Some potential partners include well drillers, restaurant owners, car wash operators, hotels and a wide range of other commercial, industrial and governmental entities. Unfortunately, these groups also are involved with many other issues that conflict with the interests of the water improvement industry. It is a shaky relationship at best. Residential sources of support offer substantial potential, but it is next to impossible to harness and empower this latent constituency.

It is my considered opinion that we should be ready and willing to pay our own way and avoid governmental involvement, intervention or

assistance. There is no lack of need for the water improvement industry. Water is constantly in the news, whether it is water savings, appliance longevity, aesthetic benefits, soap savings, fabric care, preventing scale, heating efficiency or contaminant reduction. There will always be demand for water improvement products.

Legislative cooperation is potentially beneficial, but we must take care not to get caught in the trap of governmental regulations. Our involvement should seek to prevent intrusion while encouraging sensible standards and open, free-market solutions.

Cleaning Our Own House

We as an industry need to take the lead in cleaning up our own house. There are dozens of water conditioning devices and methods purporting to tune up your immune system, restore cellular balance and even prevent cancer. We can buy machines that produce energized water, structured water, ionized water and oxygenated water, producing any number of ambiguous results. The myriad of unsubstantiated claims cast a shadow on the legitimate water professional. Water can be treated with vibrations, oscillations, catalytic processes, magnetic devices, secret rods, epitaxial crystallization and electrical pulses.

Some of these processes and devices may provide real value and legitimate benefits. The dilemma is developing widespread support for a protocol based on science to differentiate between what actually works and those products that are of no account and in some cases dangerous. Hyperbole and confusing verbiage based on anecdotal evidence are simply not sufficient.

Too many prospering from the benefit of a placebo effect or the gullibility of the general public are immune to authentic, verifiable evidence. To many, facts are like kryptonite to Superman. *wqp*

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