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THE TEXAS WATER JOURNAL is an online, peer-reviewed journal devoted to the timely consideration of Texas water resources management, research, and policy issues. The journal provides in-depth analysis of Texas water resources management and policies from a multidisciplinary perspective that integrates science, engineering, law, planning, and other disciplines. It also provides updates on key state legislation and policy changes by Texas administrative agencies.

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*make every drop count*

*Cover photo: Llano River with fisherman. ©2018 Ray Uherek.*

## **Commentary: Fresh, Clean Water for Texans Now and for Generations to Come**

Tracy O. King<sup>1\*</sup>

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**Editor-in-Chief's Note:** The Texas Water Journal invited Texas state Representative Tracy O. King, incoming chair of the House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources, to share his thoughts on what is ahead for the Natural Resources Committee. 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.

**Keywords:** Texas House of Representatives, natural resources, Texas water policy

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<sup>1</sup> Representative (D), Texas House of Representatives District 80 (Uvalde), Chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources

\* Corresponding author: [tracy.king@house.texas.gov](mailto:tracy.king@house.texas.gov)

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Let me begin by thanking Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan for appointing me to chair the Texas House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources in the 87th Session of the Texas Legislature. This will be my 11th term on the Natural Resources Committee but my first as chairman. Although I have chaired other committees in the Texas House of Representatives, I am particularly excited about this assignment. The district in southwest Texas that I represent is blessed with bountiful groundwater and several flowing rivers as well as the Falcon Dam reservoir in Zapata County. That has thrust us into many water issues over the years.

As everyone is well aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted most things, and the interim work of the Natural Resources Committee wasn't spared. In-person hearings were suspended, which meant the committee was unable to travel the state to receive testimony on issues big and small, local and statewide. The committee was unable to make site visits and see firsthand what the needs are of communities and industries across Texas. Nevertheless, the committee remained open to receiving electronic submissions of testimony on its interim charges, and Chairman Larson and his staff were able to put together a forward-looking report with many recommendations on how to address the future water needs of the state. I applaud Chairman Larson and the rest of the Natural Resources Committee members on their important work over the interim in spite of this worldwide disaster.

Since the dawn of time, it seems, every chair of the Natural Resources Committee has had the same goal: to enact a reasonable framework that allows Texans access to fresh, clean water now and for generations to come. The committee is essentially a planning one. Using the best tools, smartest experts, and latest technologies, it tries to protect what we have now and provide for the future. While I am still adjusting to the new role as chairman, I can say that this tradition will continue. I intend to run a committee that is deliberative but committed to action and that is fair but decisive. Above all, I intend to run a committee that strives to do what is best for this state and the people who call it home.

I look forward to steering the committee toward solutions that cradle Texas water policy within a predictable and reasonable yet protective regulatory architecture. Such a framework will allow Texas to continue to provide affordable and reliable water to an ever-expanding variety of users and consumers while encouraging the development and innovation of new, alternative water sources. I encourage stakeholders, experts, everyday Texans, or anyone else with a good idea to work with us so together we can meet these goals.