Testimony of Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman
Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee
Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee
January 24, 2006

Chairperson and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to brief you on important elements of Governor Schwarzenegger's Strategic Growth Plan.

The Governor is proposing this comprehensive plan as the first installment of a 20-year investment in California's future. It balances infrastructure needs with solid approaches to funding those needs. In doing so, it charts a course for the next 10 years -- and assumes future legislators and governors will continue the investment in California in the years ahead.

Phase One of the Strategic Growth Plan will ensure California's quality of life and foster the state's continued economic growth with significant investments in infrastructure. Specifically, the Governor's plan lays out more than $222 billion in infrastructure investments, of which $68 billion will be financed with General Obligation bonds.

Critical investments are proposed in six areas: transportation and air quality, K-12 education, higher education, public safety, courts and public service infrastructure, and flood control and water supply.

Today, we will provide you with information on the "Flood Protection and Clean, Safe and Reliable Water Supply Bond and Financing Acts of 2006 and 2010."

These measures will provide for the integrated management of our water resources including flood protection, increased water supply, and the careful use and management of this precious resource. The proposal has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Sam Aanestad and Mike Machado as SB 1166, and in the Assembly by Assemblymember John Laird as AB 1839.

The bill before you today proposes substantial investments in flood protection and water management. It is tempting to refer to this ambitious proposal as "unprecedented," but in fact there is a state precedent for investments of this magnitude. Previous generations of Californians had the vision, and made the investments, that propelled our state to greatness and prosperity. Settlers of the 19th and early 20th century built the flood control systems that still protect our cities. Visionary leaders such as Pat Brown and Ronald Reagan guided the development of water projects that allowed our farms and cities to thrive. Our challenge is to maintain the investments of our predecessors and expand this infrastructure to meet the needs of the 21st century.

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The most urgently needed components of the Governor's proposal will make critical repairs and improvements in our flood control infrastructure. If anyone in California had a sense of complacency about our flood risk that has surely been washed away by Hurricane Katrina and the New Year's flooding we experienced here in California. Fortunately, this administration has not been complacent. More than a year ago, we published a plan for responding to California's flood crisis. One phrase from that plan has been quoted more than any other: Our failure to maintain and improve the flood control system has created "a ticking time-bomb for flood management in California."

Last year, the administration began to address our critical flood issues by sponsoring AB 1665, a measure that the Governor looks forward to signing very soon. This year, Governor Schwarzenegger has gone further, proposing an investment strategy to implement our plan and reduce the risk of flooding for people throughout the state.
We know that a major flood could easily overwhelm California's existing flood system and lead to devastating consequences for our people, property and environment. The Governor's Strategic Growth Plan presents a great opportunity to better protect Californians from this risk with the largest single investment in flood management since the system was built 50 years ago.

Scenes of destruction on the nightly news convey a sense of urgency about flood control. But there is another aspect of water management that is equally important to our future well-being: assuring that every region of this growing state can enjoy better water quality and reliable water supplies.

Last April, the Governor released a draft update of the California Water Plan. It provides a blueprint for ensuring a secure water future through two initiatives: maintaining and improving the statewide systems built by previous generations, and providing for the unique needs of each region through integrated regional water management.

The proposed bond measure will allow us to make the investments needed to implement the new Water Plan. We will be able keep our existing systems working, develop new water supplies, and give each region tools to improve water quality, protect threatened watersheds, and conserve and recycle water supplies so that we can avoid shortages in the future.

These bond investments will allow us to catch up with our infrastructure needs, but we must not allow ourselves to fall behind again. That is why the Governor has proposed the third element of this package, a Water Resources Investment Fund. This fund will provide a long-term, stable funding source to meet California's water quality and water supply needs into the future. Now, to provide you with more detailed information on this proposal, I would like to introduce the Director of Water Resources, Lester Snow.