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In Texas, 129 municipalities admit to facing water shortages from the drouth. The state's reservoirs are down 33 percent, at their lowest levels in 23 years. Our governor is off campaigning for president. The legislature is out until the first of the year. City and county governments stay preoccupied studying growth potential. And the folks who are aware they are hooked into failing systems are left to wonder what morning they are going awaken to hear the kitchen faucets sucking air.

In June, I called the water department in San Angelo to check the city's water supply. It's risky for nearby small towns and adjacent landowners for a big city to run short of water. All kinds of spooky stories were circulating on such hombres as the oil magnate, Boone Pickens, buying water rights up on the Plains to sell to the highest urban bidder, or the heirs of the Shanghai Pierce ranch selling the underground water rights for 12 million bucks.

We already knew the Wool Capital had enough savvy to buy water rights, as they owned 26 sections' worth on the old Rollie White ranch close to Brady. Furthermore, the city's car washes and putting greens alone used enough water to drain Spring Creek and dry up Mertzon.

Once I reached the right official, he listed the five lakes as Nasworthy, Three Rivers, North Concho, Spence and Ivie. "Levels," he said, "are sufficient to last the city two and a half years without more rainfall." He went on to

say that by pumping (salty) water from Lake Spence on the Colorado River this summer and blending the water from Lake Ivie and adding the water from the 10 city wells in McCulloch County, the city had a good reserve.

Satisfied, I wandered off on other subjects until the daily newspaper in San Angelo reported that a friend of mine on the city council had passed a motion to make selling water outside the city limits illegal. Water truckers and the poor souls out of water east of Angelo reacted in an uproar, making my pal as popular as the drouth. The ban offended me. I drink a pint of Angelo water every time I'm in town. No tonic dispensed by man makes the hair glisten like a good drenching with the city's chlorine recipe.

The whole mess put a big test on our friendship, especially in public. He was the wrong kind of guy to support in a high-wired political situation, as he had too much courage and principle to back down at the right time. Also, he knew about water shortages. His family's ranch seven miles west of Angelo and depends on wells so weak a flight of blackbirds will knock the head off the aquifer. Didn't make sense he'd sponsor a bill cutting off selling water to rural folks unless the city didn't have any water to spare.

The problem came to a head when my busybody sister invited the councilman to speak to her luncheon group in San Angelo. I shot off a hot E-mail advising her that if she was going have him come to not sit between him and the back door

in case of a terrorist attack. Too, not to expect me to come to town to hear a guy speak who was hotter than the noon temperature on the sidewalks of Amarillo and Lubbock put together.

She replied that if I chose to be known as "a two-faced coward" she'd cover up the family's shame as much as possible. As poor as her charge fit, I went on into Angelo and plopped down by my pal like I thought he was going to be the next mayor and serve out his council term as mayor pro-tem.

The facts on the water shortage changed, however, once he spoke. Here is part of what he told the group about the water situation in San Angelo: "The city needs 15 to 20,000 acre-feet of water a year. The 36-inch pipe purchased to run the line from the Rollie White wells was sold. Even if the pipeline is run up to Lake Ivie at one million dollars a mile, a court judgement won by a water district limits production to 1500 acre-feet a year until 2006, when the limit escalates to a meager 2750 acre-feet. The well water is further problematic," he said, "because of EPA objections of the radium content."

Things didn't get better: "San Angelo has rights to a limited percentage of the water in Lake Spence. Repairing salt water damage to the pipeline and pumps from Spence is going to take 60 days," he continued. "The pool in Three Rivers Lake caught floodwater last month, however the level is too low to pump into the water station at Lake Nasworthy.

I try to tell everyone I can about the judgement against the White water rights. In an emergency, I suppose, we could truck water from the wells."

Sure puts us outlanders in big danger of water prospecting. Pretty clear now why San Angelo doesn't have water to sell. Sidekicks who overvalue the truth are dangerous partners in a fight. Be just like my sister to turn the guest list in to the newspaper.