

Future of our groundwater

The future of groundwater beneath Chico and its surroundings is being decided right now in ways that will not be reversible. Business interests, with heavy thumbs on regulatory boards and public officials in our dark-money era, are making these decisions behind closed doors.



by
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The author is a map artist who also serves as communications director for Groundwater For Butte, a new political-action committee.

Not surprisingly, few are aware that plans are afoot to let the water table drop far enough to guarantee widespread domestic well failure and the death of Chico's tall-tree canopy. In order to create a "water bank" plugged into the State's water markets, officials responsible for groundwater sustainability are choosing to allow business-as-usual for agriculture rather than limit overdrafting right now. The Tuscan Water District, proposed to overlay the lands west of Chico, is being sold as the solution to this reckless policy. A

small minority of landowners petitioned to force a new taxing entity upon the majority of area residents—one most will have little say in because votes are weighted by assessed land value.

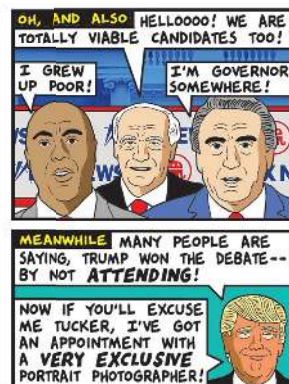
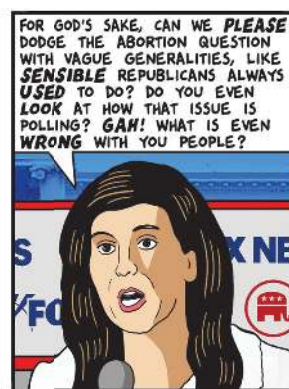
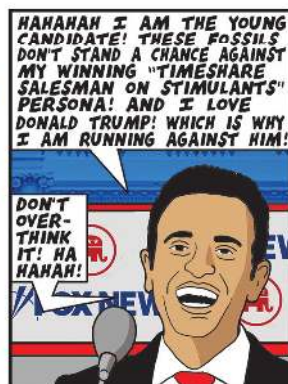
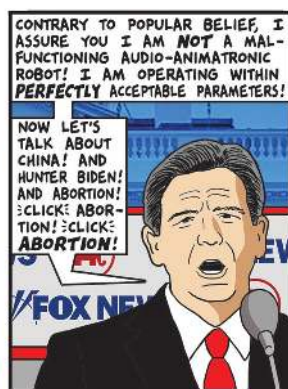
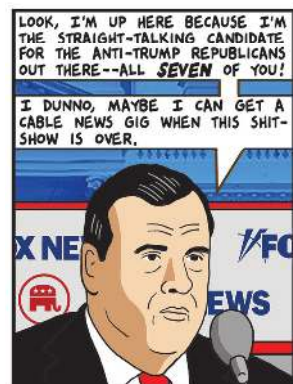
Its claimed purpose is to build pipelines, bring in surplus river water in wet years, and "recharge" the aquifer. But that water will be "banked" by the pumper once put in the ground, slowly erasing public ownership. And "recharge" is dubious at best in a basin that seeps towards Glenn County's proliferating deep ag wells.

Butte County growers were persuaded they had a black-and-white choice between keeping groundwater control in local hands ("good") or having the state put meters on all wells, keep track of who is pumping what, and charge fees above certain thresholds ("bad").

But once the Tuscan Water District connects our basin to the state's water markets, the state can simply demand transfers during drought emergencies. Indeed the Tuscan Water District is a creature of the state, and the many engineering-oriented, business-savvy consultants maneuvering about its laws and infrastructure budgets.

More info at groundwaterforbutte.org. □

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