Thoughts on golf, water and the upcoming election

Covering the golf industry for a living provides a unique perspective on presidential politics. Take, for example, the election next month. We all know about the issues that George W. Bush and Al Gore keep hammering at — education, free drugs for the Medicare crowd, “saving” Social Security and so on. But where is the fire and brimstone about other, even bigger problems?

In a page one story this month, new associate editor Joel Joyner reports on an alarming development in Southern California. A water crisis is unfolding there that ultimately will threaten the ability of golf courses to irrigate their layouts. Somehow, the game will survive in California, and browned-out lawns probably aren’t the stuff of a national debate.

But deeper in the story lies a related fact that deserves to be front and center in the election dialogue. It is this: California’s population, already at some 33 million, is expected to jump by 15.4 million more people — in the next 20 years! If California follows the national trend, virtually all of that growth will stem from immigration.

Twenty years isn’t very long to add nearly 50 percent more people to a state that already has big-time worries about its water supply (not to mention its traffic congestion). How much more dire will the water situation become when all these new arrivals start turning on the taps?

And while we’re on the subject, what is the plan for the U.S. population? Sure, we could use more golfers, but do we want to keep booming indefinitely until we surpass India and China? If California grows to 48 million people in 2020, who’s to say it won’t hit 70 million in 2050, or 120 million in 2100? The implications could be rather profound.

Southern California courses, increasingly restricted to using effluent water, might find even that hard to come by in the future. The old idea of towing icebergs down from the Arctic won’t seem so awesome in a time of global warming. How much more dire will the water situation become when all these new arrivals start turning on the taps?

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