

Bay-Delta Representatives Lead Call Against So-Called San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability Act

Feb. 16, 2012

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Ten Northern California representatives are today calling on the House Committee on Natural Resources to oppose H.R. 1837, the so-called San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability Act. As written, the legislation would divert additional water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta to South-of-Delta water users, running counter to established economic and environmental policies.

In a letter to the Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. Representatives Mike Thompson (CA-1), George Miller (CA-7), Doris Matsui (CA-5), Jerry McNerney (CA-11), John Garamendi (CA-10), Jackie Speier (CA-12), Mike Honda (CA-15), Lynn Woolsey (CA-6), Zoe Lofgren (CA-16) and Anna Eshoo (CA-14) wrote that the bill grossly dismisses the best available science, would cause job losses, repeals environmental protections, damages local tourism, hurts fishers and farmers, and should be rejected.

The lawmakers who sent the letter responded today as the legislation is being considered by the House Committee on Natural Resources:

“This legislation is nothing more than an attempt by well-funded south-of-Delta water contractors to steal water from the North with no regard for the fishers, farmers, families and businesses who depend on the Delta for their livelihoods” said **Thompson**. “This bill puts politics ahead of a half-century of established science, guts environmental protections and kills local jobs. It should be rejected, and solutions to California’s water challenges should be based on sound science so that our Delta communities, wildlife and environment are not harmed.”

"Last summer, we said that this bill would do serious damage to California’s water future. Republicans took their extreme bill behind closed doors for the rest of the year, tinkered with it, and emerged with an equally radical and damaging bill. Their bill undermines water policy throughout the west, including state policy, federal policy, and court approved settlements. Their

bill takes years of collaboration and compromise and just blows it all up. Their bill is nothing more than a deliberate special interest attack by a small group of well funded water agencies, their lobbyists, and Republican members of Congress to undermine a sound, workable and equitable solution to our state's serious water problems. Californians should recognize this bill for what it is and Congress should reject it," said **Miller**.

"This bill is a brazen move by the water contractors and their allies who want to steal water from the Delta. The farmers, families, and business owners in our region rely upon a healthy Delta for their livelihoods. The bill before the committee today has been crafted without the input of stakeholders from the Delta and should not move forward. It would have a disastrous effect on the Delta communities and cause countless jobs to be lost. To steal from one community to benefit another is completely unacceptable," said **McNerney**.

"H.R. 1837 is a shameless attempt to draw water from the farmers and urban areas of Northern California for the use of junior water right holders in the Central Valley," said **Matsui**. "Further, the bill would preempt the state from passing any stricter laws needed to protect endangered and native species, and restrict California's ability to pass tougher legislation to restore the San Joaquin River. This would dramatically undermine our state's authority to monitor, allot, and safeguard its own natural resources, as well as set a dangerous precedent for government interference in the ability of states to protect local agricultural and environmental interests. At a time when we should be working together to solve California's water problems through a balanced approach, H.R. 1837 is anything but balanced and will only create further discord."

"H.R. 1837 would alter the entirety of California's water laws," said **Garamendi**, former Deputy Secretary of the Interior. "We have had only one day to understand its implications. This could be disastrous for California's water interests. I strongly urge we step on the brakes before running roughshod over state law, threatening jobs, the environment, and our public health."

Please find the full text of the letter below.

February 16, 2012

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chairman, Subcommittee on Water and Power
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Grace Napolitano
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Water and Power
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Hastings, Ranking Member Markey, Chairman McClintock, and Ranking Member Napolitano:

We are writing today to express our strong opposition to Representative Nunes's so-called San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability Act (H.R. 1837). As Northern Californians, we believe this legislation fundamentally runs counter to our established economic and environmental policies. These broadly supported policies were established to protect natural resources, promote conservation efforts, and foster economic development within the San Joaquin Valley region.

This bill would repeal environmental protections and lead to catastrophic impacts to our valuable coastal resources, damage local businesses and tourism that rely on these resources, and could harm local farmers. This bill grossly dismisses the best available science and further jeopardizes iconic salmon and steelhead that are the focal point of many California State regulations. We have seen what happens when science is ignored for the sake of politics – this became devastatingly clear during a Northern California salmon fish kill in 2002 and fishery disaster in 2006 that were a result of too little water being delivered to critical habitat. These disasters diminished a valued natural resource and harmed associated economies. H.R. 1837 sets the stage for a similar disaster in the Bay-Delta by reverting environmental protections back to 1994 levels, undermining the Endangered Species Act, and – equally important – countering the desires of community members, elected officials, and current State policies.

Aside from gutting environmental protections, H.R. 1837 does the exact opposite of what it claims: it kills local jobs. The diversion of water south of the Delta takes it from northern farmers who rely on this supply for successful harvests and livelihoods. Economic losses to the farming industry are added to those due to a decline in tourism and local business following the decline in the natural resources that support them.

The San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability Act is nothing more than an attempt by powerful water districts south of the Sacramento River Delta to abscond with water from the north. This was highlighted in the two hearings on the bill, during which the majority of the witnesses' testimony indicated that it was seriously flawed. And yet, the Committee is voting on it with no further hearings, discussion, or collaboration.

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge your reconsideration of H.R. 1837.

Sincerely,