

Viewpoints: Solving California's reckless water policy

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It appears that Washington has awakened to the current water woes of the West Coast.

Late last week, the White House announced that President Barack Obama will visit Fresno on Friday to review and discuss federal [relief efforts](#) in response to the drought. Prior to that, the president had called Gov. Jerry Brown to express his support for our state and had mentioned to Rep. Kevin McCarthy at the State of the Union address that he had his eye on the issue. This drought has national significance; an outsized percentage of the nation's food supply is grown in California, which is the nation's No. 1 producer of fruits, vegetables and nuts.

But having an "eye on the problem" is not a solution in and of itself. And unless the president can mandate rain or snow to fall from the heavens, we still will be faced with the driest year in more than a century.

There is, however, a way that Washington can help ensure that we are left with more than prayers during future years of drought. That road has begun on one side of the Capitol and one side of [Pennsylvania Avenue](#), but we need leadership to ensure that it ends on the other side of both.

Last week, the House passed House Resolution 3964, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley Emergency Water Delivery Act, by a vote of 229-191. The bill, sponsored by Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford, restores a bipartisan 1994 agreement that strikes an appropriate balance between protecting the Delta environment and providing communities south of the Delta with critical [water supplies](#).

The bill ensures that when it rains or snows, water our communities contract and pay for is directed south so that we can use it and store it to prepare for future droughts. Current policy has left much to be desired. Today our families, farmers and businesses are paying 100 percent for water they never receive, jeopardizing the ability of California farmers and laborers to work and grow the food that feeds the nation; that is a value that no government subsidy or handout can substitute.

The Delta's health is important to all Californians. It is the lifeline of the Central Valley economy, which also happens to serve as America's agricultural breadbasket. Preventing Pacific saltwater from damaging the Delta ecosystem is just as high a priority for us as it is for our northern neighbors. But the political battleground it has become, largely thanks to fringe environmentalists espousing doomsday scenarios, fundamentally fails all of our constituents.

Due to the lack of leadership – and basic planning – on the federal and state levels, this crisis has reached a tipping point.

Our bill ends the madness.

It is now time for the Senate to act.

Fortunately, California's two U.S. senators are quite powerful. Both [Sen. Barbara Boxer](#) and Sen. Dianne Feinstein are committee chairs and subsequently hold influence with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. With such standing, a floor vote on California drought legislation should be a mere matter of parliamentary procedure.

But as any congressional observer can tell you, House-passed legislation has too often proceeded to the Senate only to collect dust. Even last Congress, the House passed similar legislation that would have helped mitigate the current devastation the drought has caused. The Senate ignored the issue and our bill died. And if this year's bill meets the same fate, the least Californians should expect is swift action on California water legislation on the Senate floor.

We don't expect our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to agree 100 percent to our solution. But even if Reid refuses to hold a simple vote on the House-passed bill, the legislative process is designed so that any idea California's senators propose, get to the floor for a vote, and pass, can then be subject to negotiations with the House to reconcile differences toward a bicameral solution.

This isn't the first or last time Mother Nature will neglect the [Golden State](#) with rain or snow. But it can be the last time our farms and families are brought to their knees by government regulations that are exacerbating the drought. Leadership is needed today, just like in 1994, to balance the needs of the Delta with the parched Central Valley that feeds our nation.

Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, represents California's 23rd Congressional District and serves as the majority whip in the [House of Representatives](#). Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford, represents the 21st District. Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, represents the 22nd District.

Read more here: <http://www.sacbee.com/2014/02/13/6152664/viewpoints-solving-californias.html#storylink=cpy>