

Earth Log: Why didn't that state leader show up?

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/03/21/3834793/why-didnt-that-state-leader-show.html>

Posted by Mark Grossi on March 21, 2014



Michael Malmgren, a Visalia walnut farmer, shows his sign to spectators in the balcony during the House Natural Resources Committee hearing.

JOHN WALKER — Fresno Bee Staff Photo [Buy Photo](#)

The massive farm [water rally in Firebaugh](#) and [the congressional water hearing in Fresno](#) this week steamrolled a lot of the same ground, but one telling moment connected them above all.

That moment was all about politics and the management of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, the troubled cross-roads of California's two longest rivers.

It happened in Fresno when Republican Congress Member Doc Hastings from central Washington glared at the empty chair among the witnesses. Felicia Marcus, chair of the State Water Resources Control Board, canceled her appearance.

Her letter said she couldn't testify because of a pending appeal on the state's emergency drought water management affecting the delta. A lot of San Joaquin Valley farmers buy Northern California river water pumped through the delta.

Marcus said such issues related to the emergency order need to be vetted in a publicly noticed process. Testimony before the congressional hearing would not be appropriate, the letter said.

Hastings, chair of the House Natural Resources Committee hearing, said he was very disappointed. Others mentioned her absence as well.

Clearly, he and other congress members wanted to confront the state about water cutbacks at the delta, as the Fresno hearing explored construction of dams and relaxing of environmental regulation.

The same emergency water order was at the center of the Firebaugh rally. Ag leaders were worried the state's order was too focused on providing water for health and safety, excluding farms completely.

The state obliged and tweaked the order to include farm and other uses if any water is available after health and safety is covered.

My point here is that this is a highly political and complex process now leaping before the public in emotional settings. Seldom is there adequate time to explain everything -- such as the absence of the state board at a congressional hearing.