

Water, water everywhere in race for Congress

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Two challenge Denham in southern S.J. district

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California's water crisis will be a key issue in California's 10th Congressional District as June's primary election approaches, according to the three candidates for the seat in the United States House of Representatives.

The district includes Stanislaus County and much of southern San Joaquin County, including Manteca and Tracy.

Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock, has been in Congress since 2010 and is being opposed by Michael Barkley, D-Manteca, and Michael Eggman, D-Kingsburg.

Denham, who previously served two terms in the state Senate, defeated Jose Hernandez, D-Stockton, in the 2012 general election, garnering 52.7 percent of the vote. Keith Smith, a political science professor at University of the Pacific, has predicted that Rep. Jerry McNerney is an overwhelming favorite to win re-election in the 9th Congressional District, and he believes Denham could score a more resounding victory in the 10th District.

"I don't see any reason why Denham's not going to win easily," Smith said. "It's a moderately Republican district and I don't think he's facing any kind of quality challenger - someone who has held prior elected office who has good name recognition. Given that I expect Republicans, on average, will do better than Democrats this year, Denham might have an easier time winning re-election than McNerney."

Denham touched on the reason he's running for re-election and outlined some of the race's most pressing issues last week. California's water shortage was a point of emphasis.

"I'm fighting for the Valley's needs, both current as well as future," he said. "That includes improving jobs and the economy, water storage, water quality and immigration reform. I think water is not only the biggest issue in the Valley but the biggest issue across the state. We need a long-term solution both on water quality as well as water storage."

Barkley said the biggest issue facing voters is unemployment. According to the state Employment Development Department, the February unemployment rate was 13.1 percent in

San Joaquin County and 13.3 percent in Stanislaus County, nearly double the national average of 6.7 percent.

"There are a lot of people out there who are out of work," Barkley said. "The jobs were there, but we sent them overseas. We need to bring jobs back from overseas, and we need to strengthen our unions to do that."

Eggman, whose sister is Assemblywoman Susan Talamantes Eggman, D-Stockton, said the water shortage is a factor in the region's struggling economy.

"The economy, of course, with the double-digit unemployment rate, is a big issue, but water ties into the economy in an agriculture district," he said. "You're not going to have a vibrant agricultural economy without an adequate supply of water."

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