

Dan Walters: Crafting a 2014 water bond will be tough slog

<http://www.sacbee.com/2014/03/25/6268276/dan-walters-crafting-a-2014-water.html>

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Published: Tuesday, Mar. 25, 2014 - 10:41 pm

Anthony Rendon, a first-term Democrat from Southern California who chairs the Assembly's water committee, is proud of a water [bond issue](#) that he wrote after eight public hearings around the state, calling it "an open and transparent process" in contrast to the backroom deals that had marked previous water bonds.

On Monday, his office touted it as "the only current bond proposal that has made it out of its house of origin ..." and declared that Tuesday's hearing in the Senate's water committee was the "perhaps final" airing before it reached the Senate floor.

Fat chance.

As soon as Rendon took his seat in the hearing room, he found his handiwork on the receiving end of sharp criticism from the Senate water committee's chairwoman, Sen. Fran Pavley, other senators and representatives of stakeholders in the notoriously fractious issue.

Among other things, senators were acidly critical of Rendon's role in introducing still another bond, in the form of "gut-and-amend" provisions in an unrelated bill – meaning there are now eight water bond versions floating around the Capitol.

There's already an \$11.1 billion water bond scheduled for the November ballot, one originally written in the dead of night five years ago, postponed twice and widely seen as untenable because it contains too many specifically earmarked allocations generally known as "pork."

This year's effort is aimed at a smaller replacement free of that epithet and, presumably, able to gain voter approval – spurred on by a severe, prolonged drought.

But despite the apparent urgency about improving water supply reliability, the stakeholders are in vast disarray on building more storage, requiring more conservation, reclaiming more wastewater, or improving more watersheds. And many seek specific allocations for their pet projects.

There is also wide disagreement on the bond's ties to boring twin water tunnels beneath the [Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta](#), Gov. Jerry Brown's huge, and hugely controversial, project.

And there's discord over who should control [bond funds](#), even if there's agreement on the amount.

Where is Brown?

While he has called for more storage, none of his drought pronouncements has even hinted that he wants another water bond. There have been some signs that Brown doesn't want any [bond issues](#) on the ballot as he campaigns for re-election as a governor who's reduced [state debt](#).

Pointedly, no one from his administration showed up at Tuesday's hearing to give guidance on his intent.

Rendon's Assembly Bill 1331 was given pro forma approval Tuesday, albeit with a bunch of amendments. But everyone involved acknowledges that writing a final version of a 2014 bond issue that can achieve a two-thirds legislative vote and gain Brown's approval will be a very tough slog at best.