

Proposed GOP overhaul of California water laws looks dead

By Carolyn
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Sen. Barbara Boxer said the proposed water bill could, "reignite the water wars by overriding critical state and federal protections for California."

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WASHINGTON — A last-ditch effort by [Central Valley Republicans](#) to push an overhaul of federal water policy through Congress during this session met with opposition Wednesday from at least one California senator, all but ensuring that the bill will die until next year.

Sen. [Dianne Feinstein](#) pulled the plug two weeks ago on months of negotiations over water legislation, prompting [House Republicans](#) from the Central Valley to try feverishly to find a path through Congress before it adjourns next week. Waiting until next year is likely to put this season's rains out of reach for agribusiness and others whom Republicans are anxious to help.

However, Sen. [Barbara Boxer](#), who for most of the year has deferred to Feinstein on the water bill talks, virtually guaranteed the legislation's demise Wednesday when she said it could "reignite the water wars by overriding critical state and federal protections for California."

Without the support of both of California's Democratic senators, the bill introduced by House Republicans late Tuesday is unlikely to pass the Democratic-controlled Senate.



Boxer said the GOP bill “would dictate specific pumping levels” of water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta that “could jeopardize our state’s salmon fishing industry.”

Feinstein was noncommittal on the GOP bill, saying she had only just received it Wednesday. She said in an interview that a compromise could eventually be reached, but that it might have to wait until next year.

Feinstein said negotiations over the summer and fall with the Republicans, led by House Majority Leader [Kevin McCarthy](#) of Bakersfield, had yielded progress. She said she will hold far less leverage when Republicans take control of the Senate in January.

“That’s the advantage of doing something now,” Feinstein said.

The Republican bill aims to move more water from the delta to farms and towns in the Central Valley. While not as far-reaching as legislation that the House passed earlier this year, it would still dictate higher flows of water south, require wildlife refuges to dig wells or buy water for wildlife and send the surface water to farmers, and truncate environmental reviews.

Feinstein and Boxer co-sponsored a Senate version that passed shortly after the first House legislation, and the two sides then began negotiations. Feinstein said the objective was “to do something that did not violate the Endangered Species Act, did not violate the Clean Water Act, did not violate biological opinions, but could get through both houses.”

Feinstein said she ended the talks this month because of an “anschluss” of negative editorials across the state that she said falsely accused her of trying to override environmental laws behind closed doors.

“All of a sudden it became like I was doing some kind of dreadful hidden thing. We weren’t,” Feinstein said. “We were trying to work out problems.”

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