

# Barbara Boxer, Kevin McCarthy trade blame over drought bill

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON

Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy are publicly blaming each other over who derailed congressional efforts last year to pass a drought relief bill for California.

McCarthy, a Republican, has maintained that lawmakers were close to passing legislation last year, but objections from Boxer spoiled negotiations between Sen. Dianne Feinstein and House Republicans.

"We almost got to a very strong place," McCarthy told The Associated Press earlier this month. "Sen. Boxer stopped it."

Boxer told reporters Wednesday that McCarthy made similar comments in a telephone call with her. She said she told him he was dreaming, and that the negotiations faltered because some parties that would be affected by the water bill weren't allowed to participate.

"A leader brings both sides into the room," Boxer said.

The finger-pointing underscores the differences that lawmakers will have to overcome if Congress is to pass legislation that would bring more water to the state's farm belt. The GOP has strengthened its hand by adding to its ranks in the House and Senate. Still, it could have a difficult time generating veto-proof support if Boxer opposes the measure.

On that front, Boxer laid out a few parameters House Republicans will have to meet to get her support. She said she can't vote for a bill that doesn't have support from state officials in California. She also said she won't support a bill that pits various regions of the state against one another.

The state is suffering from its third year of drought, and GOP lawmakers in the House have complained that environmental protections designed to protect fish and wildlife have exacerbated the water shortage in the state's San Joaquin Valley.

Boxer is focusing on legislation that would provide loans, grants and tax rebates to encourage water conservation and recycling.

At one point, Boxer referred to McCarthy's blaming her as threatening her with a street fight. "I'm good a street fights," she said. "I grew up in Brooklyn."

McCarthy's spokesman, Matt Sparks called Boxer's comments "disappointing, but not surprising."

"House Republicans remain focused on solving our water crisis that is affecting millions of Californians, and remain open to working together with willing partners committed to finding real solutions," Sparks said.