

## Jim Costa: Everyone has a role in ending our water crisis

By Jim  
Costa

The water crisis that California faces is a direct result of two factors, the driest four years on record in more than a millennium, coupled with inflexible rules for the operation of our state and federal water projects.

Making the problem worse are decades of policy makers in both Sacramento and Washington, D.C., who have been unwilling to confront the challenges affecting our state and refusing to make the difficult choices in fixing our broken water system.

Thus, we are living off the investments our parents and grandparents made over the last two generations: a system originally designed for 20 million people and the agricultural use that existed in the 1970s. It was a water system that had been the envy of the world, and helped create California's unparalleled prosperity after World War II.

But much has changed in our state over the last 30 years. We now have 38 million people. We are expected to have 50 million people by 2030 — and even more demands on our water supply.

My hope is that Gov. Jerry Brown's Executive Order of a mandatory 25% reduction in water use will make it fully evident that the severity of the current drought is increasing at an alarming rate.

However, for the last decade the people of Southern California and the Bay Area have seen this drought as a San Joaquin Valley problem that farmers, farm communities and farmworkers must solve alone. With the Metropolitan Water District having an 18-month supply of water left and Silicon Valley likely to receive no water from the San Luis Reservoir, it is clear that this water crisis is not a Valley problem, it is a California problem.

Those of us in elected office in Washington and Sacramento have different roles to play.

The governor will be key if California is to succeed. As the leader of our state, he will have to provide clarity, direction and the leadership to fix our broken water system.

We in the legislative bodies must work and support him in a strategy that incorporates milestones and markers of success. Moreover, this strategy will require a broad coalition of support.

The collective efforts of those of us in Sacramento and Washington will determine whether or not California survives this crisis and plans for the future. The alternative is that we crumble under the weight of this drought and future droughts. Doing nothing is not a solution. Our elected officials cannot continue to simply engage in political posturing, kicking this can down the road and praying for rain.

The governor's historic announcement last week, I hope, will serve as a catalyst to get meaningful legislative efforts, which provide short-term, interim and long-term fixes to our water crisis. In fact, the failure to provide operational flexibility to our water projects and our inability to permanently fix this broken water system over the last three decades have only exacerbated the situation.

We must use all of the tools in our water toolbox to develop a comprehensive solution to this crisis.

In the short term, we must provide operational flexibility to increase water deliveries with enhanced monitoring to protect endangered fish species and expedite water transfers. We must address the Coordinated Operations Agreement (COA) more fairly, provide funding for economically disadvantaged areas with water shortages, and ensure that water is not wasted.

California, as a world innovator, should increase investment dollars for research and new technologies that will advance our water solutions.

Long-term, we should include increased surface and subsurface water storage, and a conveyance solution to enhance reliability of water supplies and minimize effects on the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta ecosystem. Increased use of recycled and reclaimed water and conservation, especially in urban areas, is a must.

We should continue to improve the significant conservation that California agriculture has implemented over the last two decades, which is among the world's most efficient.

How else would we have survived the past two years with a zero water allocation under the Central Valley Water Project? Water is extremely costly and farmers do not want to put more water on a crop than is necessary. Additionally, the recently suggested notion that people in Washington or Sacramento should decide what crops we grow is literally and figuratively nuts.

As we all know, there are no easy solutions or quick fixes. There are many elements to consider and even more players pulling for their piece of the proverbial water pie. It is my sincere hope that the governor's Executive Order will wake up the rest of California and our nation and leave no doubt that the only viable path forward is joining together statewide to fix our water system and to keep California on the path to prosperity.

We in the Valley represent 4 million of the state's 38 million people. Past experience tells us that until a majority of Southern Californians and those who live in the Bay Area understand that their water is at risk, politically we will continue to have the same problems in making the necessary changes.

We must act now, before this devastating drought becomes catastrophic. Our climate is changing, and it should be clear to all that the status quo is not sustainable.

Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, represents California's 16th District, which includes all of Merced County and portions of Fresno and Madera counties.