

## House passes water bill, but drought solutions still under debate

By Michael  
Doyle



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WASHINGTON — • *House energy and water spending bill doesn't come close to addressing California's drought issues.*

- *Fresno Democrat Jim Costa joins Valley's GOP congressmen in supporting bill.*
- *Valley representatives clamor for more federal help to solve California water crisis.*

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The House on Friday passed a big energy and water spending bill that showcases the continuing federal discord over how to handle California's drought.

The \$35 billion bill includes money for the California status quo, ranging from Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta restoration to operations of the sprawling Central Valley Project. It also includes drought-related language, with directives to speed completion of water storage project studies.

The bill, approved by a largely party line 240-177 margin, does not, however, reflect significant consensus on some key California water disputes, nor does it come close to the comprehensive drought bill that has so far eluded lawmakers.

“The president has declared the drought to be a national disaster,” said Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel. “Unfortunately, we have not invested sufficiently in addressing that disaster.”

Farr, a liberal member of the House Appropriations Committee from which the Fiscal 2016 funding bill arose, joined most Democrats in voting against [the energy and water package](#).

[Three of the 10 Democrats](#) who supported the bill represent Central Valley districts where either drought or flood control issues are paramount: Rep. Jim Costa of Fresno and Sacramento-area Reps. Doris Matsui and Ami Bera.

Republicans overwhelmingly supported the legislation, though they acknowledged its shortcomings.

“I think there are some good things in the bill,” said Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock, “but there’s a lot more that we can do.”

Denham noted “we are having continuous meetings” on drafting a separate California water bill, following the inability of lawmakers to resolve their differences last year. In early April, the new chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, attended a fundraiser in Fresno and took her first, brief tour of the drought-affected area.

“We need to be able to explain to the other 49 states why California is in such a tight situation with water, and what we can do to fix it ourselves,” Denham said, adding that lawmakers are trying to decide how to move the legislation.

Some provisions in the House energy and water bill approved Friday range far afield, such as a legislative “rider” allowing guns to be carried on all Corps of Engineers’ lands. Citing the politically divisive firearms policy, among other reasons, the White House [issued a veto threat](#) against the legislation.

Other provisions target California specifically, though their future is uncertain.

One measure added in the House Appropriations Committee by Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford, sets specific deadlines for federal officials to complete water storage project feasibility studies.

Under the bill, studies of a Temperance Flat dam construction east of Fresno and a Shasta Dam expansion in Northern California will be due Dec. 31. Studies of expanding Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County and constructing Sites Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley will be due Nov. 30, 2016. A study of expanding San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos must be finished by Dec. 31, 2017.

“Each of the five studies were authorized by Congress over a decade ago,” Valadao noted in a statement. “If California had some of these dams or expansions in place, we wouldn’t be in the disastrous situation we are in today.”

His measure was added without recorded dissent, while other California provisions faced explicit resistance. [The House briefly debated](#) at about 1:20 a.m. Friday, and eventually approved along nearly party lines, an amendment by Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, that would block the [Bureau of Reclamation](#) from buying water for the purpose of supplementing river flows to help fish. McClintock’s spine-of-the-Sierra district stretches south into eastern Fresno County.

“This exacerbates an already perilous scarcity of water, while forcing the price of our remaining supplies even higher,” McClintock said of the water purchases. “It also makes a mockery of the sacrifices that every Californian is making to stretch every drop of water in their homes.”

McClintock's amendment was one of several provisions that prompted Farr to call the overall energy and water bill "disastrous," and its long-term prospects are unclear as the House legislation must still be reconciled with a Senate version.

Contact Michael Doyle: [mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com) or [@MichaelDoyle10](https://twitter.com/MichaelDoyle10) on Twitter.