

Some say President Obama's Palm Springs golf outing sends wrong message

By Matt
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After two days of fundraising in Los Angeles and San Francisco, President Obama decamped to Palm Springs over the weekend to do what many others do in the desert resort community: play golf.

8

But the president quickly found himself in a political sand trap.

The problem, critics say, is that it takes a lot of water to keep the Coachella Valley's 123 golf courses green and California is in the midst of a severe drought. Cities and towns are struggling with a statewide mandatory 25% reduction in water use.

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"Everything President Obama does in California makes a huge statement. I'd say that's the wrong statement to make," said Sara Aminzadeh, director of the California Coastkeeper Alliance. "We need our leaders at all levels to show this is a shared sacrifice and to think about how their behavior can reflect that."

The Coachella Valley's golf courses suck up about 37 billion gallons of water annually, enough to fill about 56,000 Olympic-size swimming pools. The golf industry used about a quarter of the total groundwater in the Coachella Valley Water District in 2012 and 2013.

122

A sizable aquifer supplies water to the region, but it has declined steadily. Three water districts in the Coachella Valley are among the state's top per capita water users, with daily use about 300 gallons.

The golf industry has taken steps to reduce usage. One of the courses Obama played this weekend, the historic Annenberg Estate Sunnylands, replaced one-third of its turf with tall grass and mulch.

Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz deflected criticism of Obama's fondness for fairways, telling reporters aboard Air Force One that the administration last year earmarked \$190 million for farmers and drought-ravaged communities, with an additional \$110 million on the way.

"This administration's commitment to helping those affected by the drought is second to none," Schultz said.

Jonathan Parfrey, executive director of Climate Resolve, said it was misguided to criticize the president's choice of golf destinations "given his incredible environmental record."

"The one thing that's going to really affect Southern California more than any other environmental effect is climate change, and this president has done everything in his power" to reduce greenhouse gases, Parfrey said. "The best way to participate in achieving environmental goals is not by wagging the finger."

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