

Californians clash over money for drought in spending bill

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Wire

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California Republicans will continue trying to include language addressing the state's drought in a must-pass bill to fund the federal government, over objections from the state's Democratic delegation.



On Wednesday, 21 Democrats sent a letter to President Obama that outlined their objections to the approach and the policies the proposal contains. It was signed by 16 of 39 California House members. Last week some lawmakers and Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer [fumed over news that the 14 Republicans in the delegation](#) had offered the language.

Members from both parties and their staffs have met regularly, but unofficially, for months in an attempt to reconcile a House bill proposed by Rep. David Valadao (R-Hanford) and a [Senate](#) bill proposed by Feinstein.

Few days remain before members leave for the year. With no final plan in sight, Republicans put forward a draft of the negotiated bill to be included in legislation to fund most government operations.

[Drought relief language proposed by California Republicans](#)

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[Discussion Draft]

Valadao said Wednesday he hopes Feinstein and Boxer will change their minds.

"We're looking for some support from our senators. At the end of the day that is all that I need and as the community continues to dry up we need some support on that side of the Capitol and hopefully we're able to move forward with it," he said. "We're hopeful. There's not a whole lot I can say at this point."

[Language Proposed to be Included]

1 **TITLE ____—CALIFORNIA EMER-**
 2 **GENCY DROUGHT RELIEF**
 3 **AND WATER STORAGE**
 4 **SEC. __01. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS; FINDING;**
 5 **DEFINITIONS.**
 6 (a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This title may be cited as the
 7 "California Emergency Drought Relief and Water Storage
 8 Act of 2015".

Nothing has changed since Friday, Feinstein's staff said, and the senator still opposes including drought language into a spending bill that hasn't been publicly vetted.

Valadao disagreed with that argument.

"This has been an ongoing effort for years," he said. "This isn't a new conversation. For anybody to say that there was some new language that has never been talked about before is not true. We've been working with senators, we've had meetings, we've had conversations. There are no new ideas, there are no surprises in here at all."

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Rep. John Garamendi (D-Walnut Grove), who participated in negotiations to reconcile the House and Senate bills and [signed the letter to Obama](#), said Democrats may have negotiated, but didn't get a say in what specifically went into the proposal Republicans put forth.

"It's not a compromise," Garamendi said. "We were negotiating and then the negotiations stopped and there have

been no negotiations for three weeks. They simply put out a 92-page bill and said take it or leave it. Nobody has had the chance to look at this, it hasn't been distributed."

A Republican aide framed the GOP plan as an emergency proposal to take advantage of the [deluge of water when El Niño hits California](#) this winter.

The aide said the spending bill is the logical vehicle, as one of the last measures still pending, to address the drought before Congress leaves and the rain begins. The aide noted it's not the only option Republicans will consider.

Several California Democrats said Wednesday they had not yet seen the 92-page proposal, obtained by the Los Angeles Times. If the overall spending bill is signed with this language, it would authorize, among other elements:

- \$100 million for desalination projects
- \$200 million for water recycling projects
- Increases in how much water can be pumped from the delta area, as long as it doesn't cause additional harm to native fish
- Expansion of the use of conservation hatcheries for salmon and Delta Smelt

[Congressional Republicans demand plan for collecting El Niño water](#)

The White House said when Valadao's bill [passed in June](#) that President Obama would veto it. The House bill aimed to funnel more water to San Joaquin Valley growers by reducing the amount used to support endangered fish populations.

The GOP-controlled Senate [hasn't considered Feinstein's bill](#), which focuses more on water storage, desalination and other projects.

After the House failed to pass a short-term extension Wednesday, Congress has until Friday to pass the spending measure and avoid a government shutdown.

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