

Editorial: Federal water bill deserves California's full support

By the Editorial Board

Everyone who runs for Congress claims to be a problem-solver.

Yet California is saddled with a congressional delegation that has [failed to find common ground on a \\$1.3 billion water bill](#) that would deliver more irrigation water and help the environment in a state whipsawed by four years of drought.

When it became clear last week that the latest effort on this legislation was kaput, the politicians did what they so often do in the face of failure: point fingers.

Northern California Democrats – sensitive to regional needs and the desires of environmental interests – said they largely had been frozen out of negotiations.

Central Valley Republicans, who have had a front-row view of fallowed farmland, job losses and people in community food lines, pinned the blame on California's two Democratic senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer.

We wouldn't blame Feinstein if she believes the adage "no good deed goes unpunished" was aimed specifically at her.

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First, a staffer of House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, [presented a water bill package as having been signed off on](#) by Feinstein when she had not approved the final language. Then later McCarthy complained that "our senators have once again failed to rise and meet the challenge with us."

McCarthy's remarks ignored the fact that Feinstein has invested considerable political capital into this legislative effort and was able to enlist the support of Boxer, a passionate advocate for environmental interests.

The good news is, agreement has been reached in several areas, including consideration of new water storage projects and funding for recycling and desalination. And Republicans have dropped their misguided efforts to amend the Endangered Species Act.

Still to be hashed out, reported Michael Doyle of McClatchy's Washington bureau, are "key questions related to increased water pumping to farms."

All sides should return to the negotiating table as soon as possible. That is because this legislation would benefit a California water system that doesn't meet the needs of the state's 39 million residents – drought or no drought.

For example, the bill provides partial funding for Sites Reservoir, proposed on the west side of the Sacramento Valley, and Temperance Flat, proposed for the upper San Joaquin River north of Fresno. These federal dollars would leverage allocations from the \$7.5 billion state water bond should one or both of the dams be approved.

There also is funding in the federal bill for improved spawning grounds and passage ways for fish. Operational flexibility provisions would be underpinned by real-time monitoring of fish locations in the Delta, thus providing an opportunity to pump more water to farms without hurting fish species.

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won't end the drought. Nor can California meet its water needs through conservation efforts alone.

California's congressional delegation should put down their talking points, stop playing political games and come together to get this vital legislation passed early next year.