

California lawmakers propose \$687 million in drought relief

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Sacramento – Gov. Jerry Brown and legislative leaders proposed Wednesday that the state spend \$687 million on shovel-ready projects and aid that will help California weather the drought.

The proposal would expedite the use of \$549 million in previously approved but unspent bond money slated for water supply projects throughout the state, such as storm water capture, expanded use of recycled water and ground water management. The state would also contribute \$46 million from its general fund and federal funds to provide food and housing assistance for workers whose hours or jobs have been cut due to the drought.

Additional money would be sent to state and local conservation corps to help communities with efficiency upgrades, while providing \$1 million to Save Our Water for a public awareness campaign.

“This is a call to action,” Brown said. “Each week we review where we are, but what’s needed will be done and is being done.”

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg and Assembly Speaker John Perez joined Brown in making the announcement Wednesday, saying they would do whatever they could to expedite the legislation in the coming weeks so needed-projects and aid can move forward. Perez said a water bond on the ballot later this year is critical to improving the state’s long-term ability to negate the impacts of future droughts by improving storage, while ensuring all communities have access to clean water.

Lawmakers are haggling over changes that reduce the size of an \$11 billion water bond scheduled to go before voters in November.

Perez said getting through the current drought requires more than just legislation.

“Every Californian needs to be part of the solution,” Perez said. “We strongly urge every person in our state to take actions to conserve water.”

California Republican lawmakers criticized the proposal, calling it “a drop in the bucket” and “simply too little too late.”

Brown said California can’t wait for a gridlocked Congress to address the situation. The House approved a Republican-backed bill that diverts water to farms, while California U.S. senators

Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer introduced legislation that gives \$300 million in emergency drought aid.

Boxer said Wednesday that both parties need to work together and that she is “proud” the president came to California last week to see the issues for himself.

“Believe me, everybody’s going to step up to the plate on this,” Boxer said. “We’ll get through this.”