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COMMITTEE ON BUDGET

ASSISTANT REPUBLICAN WHIP

May 7, 2009

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The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear President Obama:

Just over three months ago, I sent you two letters (enclosed) requesting immediate assistance to alleviate the economic and social disaster caused by the water crisis in the San Joaquin Valley of California. I followed up with questions to Secretary Geithner during his appearance before the House Budget Committee in March. To date, I have not received a response to any of my inquiries.

We had great hope in April, when you sent Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to survey the situation and announce stimulus money for projects that were expected to address the water crisis. Despite pleas from Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, Secretary Salazar failed to visit the region hardest hit by this water crisis. Instead, he spent his time flying around the area and handing out stimulus money to environmental projects that will do nothing to solve the current crisis. We were not only astonished, but deeply disappointed. Indeed, one headline in the regional newspaper read "Obama to Valley agriculture: Dry up."

While the rest of the country is dealing with a recession, the San Joaquin Valley has reached Great Depression level unemployment, with many areas at 20% and some areas reaching 40% unemployment. This dire situation has not only deteriorated further, but without immediate corrective action the troubles will continue for years to come. There are steps that can be taken to provide short-term relief and long-term stability.

- Support legislation to temporarily waive the Endangered Species Act in times of a declared emergency;
- Support efforts to direct the construction of a Delta conveyance project known as the Peripheral Canal;
- Support legislation to authorize the construction of new water storage projects;
- Expedite water transfers that are currently pending;
- Partner with Governor Schwarzenegger to temporarily reduce water allocations for wildlife refuges which can be done under existing authority;
- Partner with Governor Schwarzenegger to authorize and fund the construction of an intertie between the Delta Mendota Canal and the State Water Project and authorize and fund the construction of South Delta Operable Gates;
- Delay implementation of the San Joaquin River Settlement until the economic impacts of the current crisis can be mitigated and a plan can be implemented to recover lost water.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of my requests. In the meantime, I would be grateful for any assistance you can provide to my local charities and food banks, which are on the frontline of this crisis. I look forward to working with you and await a timely response.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Devin Nunes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Devin Nunes  
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California  
The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior  
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, United States Senator

# Obama to Valley agriculture: Dry up

Fresno Bee

Published Thursday, Apr. 16, 2009

The Obama administration dispatched Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to California Wednesday to announce \$260 million in economic stimulus funding for water projects. The most obvious question was how much would go to drought relief in the San Joaquin Valley, especially since Salazar was in California at the same time as the March for Water was being conducted on the Valley's west side.

The answer was a simple one from Salazar — the vast majority of this money won't be seen in the farmworker-dominated communities that are experiencing 40% unemployment because of drought conditions. But there was plenty of money for projects in Northern California for environmental uses.

No wonder so many San Joaquin Valley farmers, farmworkers and others in agriculture-related businesses are so angry with the federal government on the water issue. Officials in the Obama administration, including Salazar, don't understand San Joaquin Valley agriculture and don't seem to want to learn.

The four-day water march from Mendota to the San Luis Dam would have been the perfect opportunity for Obama officials to throw a little money the Valley's way to let residents know that the pain being felt in communities such as Mendota is acknowledged in Washington, D.C. The symbolism would have been significant.

Instead, Salazar stiffed the Valley's west side. This is one more indication of the region's lack of political clout. Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, said the federal stimulus money going to other water projects was "very disappointing." He should have said he was outraged, and the Obama administration had abandoned some of California's poorest communities by ignoring the west side in this round of stimulus payouts.

"There is absolutely nothing in there that would benefit us," said Sarah Woolf, a spokeswoman for Westlands Water District. Valley farm-water agencies wanted funding for fish screens in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta that would allow for more water to be pumped southward. They also wanted money for a pipeline to move water between Valley districts.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein says there will be some money for the region in the \$40 million drought-relief portion of the package for Western states. She contends that most of that money will go to California and some is intended for the Valley. We appreciate Feinstein's efforts seeking drought relief, but we question the sincerity of the White House in dealing with agricultural issues in the Valley.

Many farmers get water from the estuary, but declining fish populations have led to pumping restrictions. The curtailments, combined with the three-year drought, have left growers with little water to grow crops, and that has resulted in massive joblessness in west-side communities.

Salazar went on a helicopter tour of the Delta Wednesday with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who praised the funding announcement. But the governor also said these funds will not immediately help Valley farmers, and the communities that rely on agriculture, and they need help now.

Schwarzenegger is correct, and it was good that he let Salazar know his water announcement didn't go far enough. We'd also like to see more passion out of the governor on the plight of the Valley communities during this drought.

Schwarzenegger is scheduled to meet the marchers at San Luis Reservoir Friday morning, and speak at a rally. It wouldn't be wise for the governor to praise Salazar's action when he speaks to the farmers and farmworkers who just completed the 50-mile march for water.

There's a lot of anger in the Valley right now, and there's good reason for it.

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UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
February 26, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear President Obama:

It has been three weeks since my last correspondence (attached) and the economic catastrophe caused by water supply shortages in the State of California has only gotten worse. We have now seen your stimulus package enacted and the omnibus appropriations bill pass the House. Yet, despite my urging, neither of them contained a "zero cost" provision that would save 80,000 jobs in the San Joaquin Valley.

A simple measure that would save up to 80,000 jobs would be to relax restrictions on pumping facilities in the Sacramento - San Joaquin Rivers Delta that have caused the regulatory drought that my constituents are experiencing. (Presently those restrictions are resulting in a loss of nearly 8,000 acre-feet per day.) By eliminating those restrictions you would enable family farmers to cultivate nearly 500,000 acres of land that otherwise will have to be fallowed because of a lack of water. The economic loss of fallowing this ground will reach \$2.2 billion dollars. Ironically, this is close to the same amount of money that my constituents are being asked to provide the Federal government as their share of the nearly one trillion dollar stimulus package.

Your administration requested a list of "shovel ready" projects that can break ground within 180 days. Below is a list of such projects that total \$261 million. Considering my constituents were asked to pay nearly \$2 billion to fund your economic stimulus package, I would hope that you are able to find a way to invest a small portion of their funds back into the local community.

- \$3 million for the completion of State Route 180 from Temperance to Academy in Fresno, California;
- \$2.5 million for Friant Road Reconstruction (SR 41 - Shepherd) in Fresno, California;
- \$5 million for Manning Avenue Rehabilitation in Reedley, California;
- \$4.2 million for Dimuba Avenue Rehabilitation in Reedley, California;
- \$170 million for State Route 99 expansion between the cities of Goshen and Tulare, California;
- \$7 million for Betty Drive Widening in Tulare County, California;
- \$14 million for Ben Maddox Bridge Widening in Visalia, California;
- \$48 million for Road 80 expansion in Tulare County, California;
- \$7.2 million for Road 192 expansion in Tulare County, California;

I remain convinced that you can achieve a "zero cost" immediate relief by restoring delta pumping to historic levels. But in the meantime, I stand ready to work with you on these projects.

Best regards,

Devin Nunes  
Member of Congress

CC: Speaker Nancy Pelosi; Interior Secretary Ken Salazar; Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger; Senator Dianne Feinstein; Senator Barbara Boxer; California Secretary for Natural Resources Mike Chrisman;

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February 6, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20502

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger  
Governor, State of California  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Obama and Governor Schwarzenegger:

The State of California is experiencing a disaster. The economy of the state is dependent on two major water supply projects that were designed and built in the middle of the Twentieth Century, the Central Valley Project (CVP) and the State Water Project (SWP). Collectively, these projects serve more than 25 million people in the San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California and serve more than three million acres of highly productive farmland. However, we have failed to invest in the infrastructure required to make these Projects capable of serving the current needs of the state. Moreover, our failure to invest in conveyance infrastructure in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Rivers Delta has subjected the CVP and SWP to severe restrictions under the Endangered Species Act. As a consequence, the people who rely on the CVP and SWP are facing unprecedented water supply shortages at the hands of policymakers.

For the first time in the history of the CVP, which is operated by the Bureau of Reclamation, agricultural water service contractors on the westside of the San Joaquin Valley will receive no water for the irrigation of nearly a million acres of farmland. As a consequence, as much as 500,000 acres will be forced out of production and, according to a recent forecast by economists at the University of California, Davis, more than 40,000 farm workers will lose their jobs. This is a number which exceeds the number of job losses at General Motors. Moreover, these job losses will occur in poor, rural communities, such as the City of Mendota, which already has unemployment rates in excess of 40%, and these communities are the least capable of reacting to this economic devastation.

This year the SWP, which is operated by the California Department of Water Resources, will be able to deliver only 5-10% of normal allocations to cities and farms served by the SWP. The economic losses in places like the Los Angeles basin and Silicon Valley, which rely on water from the SWP, will be exponentially greater than losses in the farming communities of the San Joaquin Valley, and the consequences of this water supply disaster will eviscerate any benefits from a stimulus package passed by the Congress.

I am writing to urge you to act immediately to ameliorate the economic disruption that is already occurring in California. There are actions that can be taken. For instance, New Melones

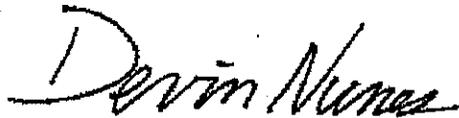
Reservoir, which is owned by the Bureau of Reclamation, currently holds nearly 1.2 million acre-feet of water. Historically, water from this reservoir has been used primarily to enhance fisheries in the Stanislaus River. However, current needs demand that this water be made available to farmers and cities outside of the historic place of use, and it is within the discretion of your agencies to enable this change. In addition, agencies within your respective administrations exercise great discretion in the administration of federal laws, like the Endangered Species Act and the Central Valley Project Improvement Act; or state laws, like the California Water Code. These agencies should be directed to exercise that discretion in a manner that will enable the CVP and the SWP to move water to the farms and cities that depend on these projects. I implore each of you to direct agencies under your control to take all steps necessary to restore water supplies to some sense of normalcy.

Finally, I am asking that you join me in supporting legislation that will prevent environmental laws from impeding progress on stimulus projects and actions required to deal with emergencies like the one currently facing California. Senator David Vitter has proposed an amendment to the stimulus bill that would exempt from the application of the National Environmental Policy Act for a period of three years projects intended to stimulate the economy and exempt from the application of the Endangered Species Act actions taken during periods of a declared emergency to mitigate the impacts of that emergency. I will introduce companion legislation in the House of Representatives at the earliest opportunity. Please support Senator Vitter's proposed amendment and my legislation.

As you know, the San Joaquin Valley is America's breadbasket. Our region supplies food and fiber to the world. Communities in the San Joaquin Valley grew on the foundation of a strong agriculture economy, but today many of those communities are withering because of chronic water supply shortages. I do not believe that I am exaggerating when I state that people in rural areas of the San Joaquin Valley are facing a humanitarian crisis unparalleled in modern history. Moreover, large urban areas of California are about to experience the hardship endured by these rural communities for the last two decades.

While you cannot reverse decades of bad decisions overnight, you do have options before you today. I urge you to exercise leadership and act now to mitigate the suffering of my constituents. Failure to act will simply push the San Joaquin Valley unemployment rate above 20% and result in the collapse of civil society.

With deep concerns,



Devin Nunes  
Member of Congress

CC: Speaker Nancy Pelosi; Interior Secretary Ken Salazar; California Secretary for Natural Resources Mike Chrisman; Senator Dianne Feinstein; Senator Barbara Boxer