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Opening Statement
Congressman Tom McClintock
House Water and Power Sub-Committee
February 4, 2010

Last week, Republicans held a listening forum in Fresno to hear directly from the people of California's Central Valley who have been devastated by the federal government's willful decision to turn off their water to indulge the environmental left's pet causes.

I'm sorry this sub-committee chose not to attend. If my colleagues had attended, they would have heard the rain outside, while inside they would have heard that up to 10,000 extra acre feet of water is being sent out to the ocean PER DAY because of federal environmental regulations. As Tom Birmingham from the Westlands Water District just said in the Contra Costa Times, "Under the federal rules, the more it rains, the more water we lose." This is insanity.

To make matters worse – and a day after our listening session in Fresno – the administration tried to misrepresent the release of ALREADY SCHEDULED water deliveries as some sort of great new relief to the Valley. This prompted the Fresno Bee – hardly a hotbed of conservative activism – to say that Secretary Salazar (quote) "either doesn't understand the complicated Western water picture or he thinks Valley residents can be fooled by his pronouncements."

This is the same Secretary Salazar who admitted to the Natural Resources Committee last year that the government had the authority to turn the pumps back on but that it chose not to do so because (quote) "it would be like admitting failure."

Absent administration action, we have a bill languishing in the Natural Resources committee that will turn those pumps back on, authored by Mr. Nunes, but the committee obstinately refuses to hear it. Instead, we have Mr. Costa's bill to use so-called stimulus funding to build fish screens. This is now being touted as some great new relief to the Valley. We're not willing to turn the pumps back on – which costs taxpayers nothing – but we're more than happy to shovel untold millions of dollars for fish screens and other environmental mitigations.

The approach of the majority party reminds me of something Leo Tolstoy wrote about the Czar's despotic rule. He wrote, "I sit on a man's back choking him and making him carry me, and all the while I assure him and anyone who will listen that I am very sympathetic to his plight and willing to do everything I can to help – except by getting off his back."

Madam Chairwoman, this is becoming farcical. The people of the San Joaquin Valley are not asking for taxpayer handouts, they are simply asking Congress to find the political will to act and to act now. An almond orchard that dies for lack of water isn't going to produce almonds this year. But it also isn't going to produce almonds next year or the year after. We are now in imminent danger of destroying the agricultural infrastructure of the Central Valley – solely because of the intransigence of this very sub-committee.

So I say, as plainly as I can – Mr. Salazar, turn on these pumps. Madam Chairwoman, turn on these pumps.

The time to act is long overdue. There is nothing that I can find in this bill that will restore water deliveries to the Central Valley this year. NOTHING. There is very little in this bill that will directly deliver additional water to the Central Valley ever.

Only the pumps can do that. For the sake of humanity, Madam Chairwoman and my Democratic colleagues, turn on these pumps.