

**Opening Statement of  
Congressman Devin Nunes  
Before The House Committee on Natural Resources  
Wednesday, March 19, 2014  
Fresno, California  
Full Committee Oversight Hearing on  
"California Water Crisis and Its Impacts: The Need for Immediate and Long-Term Solutions"**

The environmental lobby and its allies attribute the current water crisis to a historic drought induced by global warming. But they have it wrong. Central Valley farmers are fallowing their lands, but not because of low levels of rainfall. Our communities are restricting water usage, but not because the world is getting warmer. And our water districts are receiving a fraction of their allocations, but not because of greenhouse gases.

The problem is not that the Central Valley is lacking water, it's that we're being deprived of it.

Our forefathers blessed this state with an amazing irrigation system that could withstand five years of drought. The principle was simple – water was captured during wet years for use in dry ones.

We're still capable of doing that, but we're not allowed. For decades, preposterous environmental regulations have put more and more water off-limits to people. Before these regulations began taking hold in the early 1990s, water districts routinely received 100 percent of their water allocations. Since then, they've hardly ever received 100 percent, and today many actually receive zero percent.

For the sake of supposedly persecuted fish species – the salmon, the steelhead, and the most precious of all, the three-inch baitfish called the Delta smelt – government authorities have diverted enormous supplies of water from human usage. How much water has been lost? Consider this: in the past seven years, 3.9 million acre feet of water that could have been used by families and farmers have been flushed out into the ocean. That is not a result of global warming or drought – it's a result of government run amuck.

Altogether, the diversion of water from farms and communities to environmental causes has created an average annual water shortfall of 1.75 million feet on the westside and 250,000 acre feet on the eastside, plus an eastside groundwater overdraft of 400,000 acre feet. That leads to a total average annual shortfall of 2.4 million acre feet in the Central Valley. This means if nothing is done, around 800,000 acres of productive farmland will be forced out of production.

The House of Representatives passed a bill six weeks ago, which followed a similar bill passed in 2012, that would eliminate this shortfall completely. If the new bill had been in effect for the last seven years, about half the water flushed into the ocean would have been kept in usage – and some might say we could use an extra 2 million acre feet of water right now.

More recently, after years of total inaction as this grave problem destroyed thousands of jobs for farmers and farmworkers, the Senate finally introduced a bill that would alleviate some of the water shortfall – it would supply around 300,000 acre feet, leaving a deficit of 2.1 million acre feet. Of course, simply introducing a bill doesn't achieve anything – the Senate needs to pass it, so that the House and Senate can go to conference and hammer out a compromise bill.

It must be crystal clear to everyone, however, that if a compromise bill provides anything less than the 2.4 million missing acre feet, then the State of California, counties, cities, and irrigation districts – not the federal government – will be responsible for overcoming the remaining deficit.

What many people don't realize is that the fallowing of farmland and the uprooting of entire communities is not a side-effect of the radical environmentalists' actions; it is their goal. For extremists who view human settlement and productive economic activity as a blight on nature, it's a good thing that water-deprived families are abandoning their farms and homes. These extremists won't uproot themselves from their comfortable houses in San Francisco and other coastal cities, but they're more than willing to use Central Valley communities as guinea pigs to see if our lands can be restored to some mystical state of nature.

These radicals never tire of the battle, and they never give up. You see the results of their relentless fight in the new dustbowl that has overtaken the Central Valley. They are using all their influence to oppose the House-passed water bill that would permanently end this crisis, and they recently imposed their will on the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Meanwhile, Ag groups, lawyers, and lobbyists who are supposed to be representing Valley farmers are primarily acting to protect their own high-paying jobs and pensions.

When a government cannot provide water to its citizens, that government has failed. Victims of its policies have two options – to rise up and protest until these policies are changed, or watch helplessly as their communities are destroyed. The leftists who engineered this crisis understand this. To try to keep their victims from protesting, they have offered up the scapegoat of global warming. And to buy them off, they have offered programs and bills that don't provide water, but do pay out large sums of money, essentially giving welfare to people who just want to work.

By passing two comprehensive water bills, the House of Representatives has already shown that it's on the side of the people of the Central Valley. But that is not enough to restore their water. As shown by the Ninth Circuit Court's ruling last week in favor of the Delta smelt, even during a historic water crisis, the radical environmental agenda advances remorselessly. The smelt may have won another victory, but the struggling farmers, the thirsty families, and the shattered communities of the Central Valley are paying the price.

I have been fighting these extremists for more than a decade in Congress, and as long as the people of this valley entrust me as their representative, I will continue fighting. I will give a voice to people who will not sit idly by while their livelihoods are stolen away from them and the hopes and dreams of their children and grandchildren are grinded into dust.