

Rep. Tom McClintock  
Floor Statement on  
HR 2442 (Miller) "Water Recycling"  
October 15, 2009

M. Speaker:

Those who blame the drought for the tragedy unfolding in California's Central Valley ignore the fact that this is a very mild drought by historical standards and that in far worse droughts in the past, far more water was delivered to the Central Valley. I wonder if the proponents seriously deny that 200 billion gallons of water have been diverted to meet various environmental regulations.

It is morally unconscionable that water recycling bills to benefit the pampered and privileged communities of San Francisco can sail through the House, while 40,000 families have lost their jobs in the San Joaquin Valley because this government has diverted 200 billion gallons of water in order to indulge one of the environmental Left's pet causes, the Delta Smelt.

But I want to address the basic economics of these programs.

A generation ago, the principal objective of our water policy was to create abundance. It was an era when vast reservoirs produced a cornucopia of clean and plentiful water on a scale so vast that many communities didn't even bother to meter it.

That clean, cheap and abundant water also made America the bread basket of the world – and the Central Valley the bread basket of California.

But the majority party has abandoned this policy, and has replaced it with a very different philosophy: that the government's principal focus should not be to produce abundant water, but rather to ration and recycle shortages that government has caused by abandoning abundance as its primary objective.

The result is increasingly expensive water that now affects our prosperity as a nation. By its own admission, this Administration is no longer analyzing the costs and benefits of the projects in the bill now before us. In committee, the administration admitted that it faces a \$600 million backlog of 53 water recycling projects like these and still hasn't even bothered to prioritize them – let alone figure out how to pay for them.

This bill provides a 25 percent federal match for six local water recycling projects in the San Francisco Bay area, and increases the maximum federal cost share for two others.

The total cost to American taxpayers is \$38 million in order to produce 2.6 billion gallons, according to the sponsor, or 8,000 acre feet.

Let's do the math here. \$38 million for 8,000 acre feet of water. That comes to \$4,500 per acre foot – and that's just the federal share. The total cost is four times that amount, or \$18,000 per acre foot.

Let's compare that to the capital cost of the nearby Oroville Dam. That was roughly \$600 million in 1968 – or \$3.5 billion in today's dollars. That dam produces 3 ½ million acre feet of water. In other words, the modern day inflation adjusted cost of the Oroville Dam – including its massive power plant -- comes to \$1,000 per acre foot. The projects in this bill cost \$18,000 per acre foot, including a \$4,500 per acre foot cost to the national treasury, which, in case you haven't noticed, is empty.

I raised these issues in committee, but didn't actively oppose this bill because the House has yet to set standards for recycling measures like this one.

But I must also concur with Ranking Member Hastings, Congressman Nunes and others that it is a travesty that we should vote for 2 ½ billion more gallons of water for San Francisco while taking away 200 billion gallons of water from the Central Valley of California.

At the same time that Central Valley taxpayers are struggling with up to 40 percent unemployment rates, at the same time that all taxpayers are paying higher grocery bills as a result of these unconscionable water diversions, those same taxpayers are being asked to pay a super-premium subsidy to Bay Area water users whose representatives have endorsed this folly.

And to add insult to injury, Mr. Nunes is not even allowed to offer amendments to restore water deliveries that would mean jobs for 40,000 unemployed Californians without costing the treasury a dime.

For all of these reasons, I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill.

Not only can we do much better – we could not possibly do any worse.