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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Statement by the Honorable Doc Hastings
Ranking Republican
House Natural Resources Committee
before the House Water and Power Subcommittee
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4225 (Costa)
February 4, 2010

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Chairwoman Napolitano, thank you for holding today's hearing. The state of California's water supply has been a key topic of debate so far in this Congress. I wish I could say that we've had the opportunity to resolve it by now, but perhaps this legislation – if the Democrat leadership allows us to improve it – could be the first step in resolving this situation once and for all.

What is happening in the San Joaquin Valley of California could directly impact all Americans through higher food prices at a time when a great many can least afford it. But, what is occurring there should also be a stark warning sign that it could happen elsewhere in the western United States. As the Representative of a Washington state congressional district that is home to hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland irrigated with water delivered by Federal pumps and from Federal reservoirs, I do not ever want to see the day that a man-made, government-enforced drought devastates these communities.

This is not the first time that a region of country has faces such a situation, but what is missing in this Congress is the political will to do anything about it. In 2004, when the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, was threatened with the loss of its water supply due to the presence of the silvery minnow, Congress rightfully found the will to provide relief to New Mexico when the House and the Senate, in a bipartisan way, voted for a remedy to Albuquerque's problem.

Yet, today, the Democrat Majority refuses to even allow debate for providing the same real relief to the San Joaquin Valley. In fact, Republicans have been forced to hold their own proceedings in the Valley because the Democrats refused to hear firsthand from the people and families affected by this regulatory drought, and we are forced to file a discharge petition on a bill aimed at turning the pumps back on.

Would the same aloof treatment occur if San Francisco or Seattle or New York City's drinking water source was compromised? I think not.

This Congress needs to act on the San Joaquin Valley before it is too late. It's our duty as Representatives of the people to help. This bill is a start, but it's time to roll up our sleeves and get to the heart of the problem: turning the pumps back on now.