

Committee on Resources

Testimony

Subcommittee on Water and Power

Thursday, April 17, 1997

1324 Longworth HOB, 9:30 A.M.

Opening Statement

John T. Doolittle, Chairman
Subcommittee on Water and Power

Oversight Hearing Concerning
the President's FY 1998 budget request for
the for CALFED Program

April 17, 1997

The CALFED Program promises to be one of the most important issues considered by this Subcommittee in this Congress. It represents a major Federal and State commitment to solving California's water needs and sets the stage for future water management policies and facilities in the Golden State. It is critical that we use this opportunity to meet the needs of all our constituents . . . agriculture and urban . . . land owner and conservationist . . . business owner and recreationalist alike. Let us also be clear, funding for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, under consideration today is not limited to a funding request for this year, nor is it limited to the three years in the current authorization; it is a program likely to involve decades of Federal and State funding commitments.

The current Federal CALFED authorization, as large as it is, proposes implementation of only certain limited aspects of the program in this and the next two fiscal years, while postponing the authorizations and funding requests for most of the program into future years. All of the CALFED alternatives under consideration are estimated to range from \$4 billion to \$8 billion, an amount to be paid over 20 to 30 years. This is the time to hear a solid commitment from those most interested in the current CALFED program objectives, that they will be full participants and supporters of the later phases of the project, when the relative funding for projects they now support are on the decline.

Another issue of concern is the need to develop criteria to assess the successful implementation of these early portions of the program. When the object of an authorization is a dam or a water recycling plant, success is achieved when the facility is completed and becomes operational. Not only do we currently lack the specifics on the projects to be undertaken in this phase of CALFED, but there are no measuring sticks to determine that we have achieved a specified goal, once the money has been spent. How do we know that there will not just be an endless flow of requests for new funding, based not on the need to achieve a new goal but rather because we haven't defined success? If we do not define the measure of success we will be asked to spend unlimited resources with no hope of closure. The CALFED program must incorporate milestones and objective measurements that define when specific goals have been met.

Finally, this phase of the program represents a major public acquisition of private property rights. Much of the area viewed as potential habitat, meander belts, and ecosystem management zones is currently held by private interests. Their predecessors built hundreds of miles of levees and reclaimed tens of thousands of acres of land in the 1800's. This land is now used throughout the Delta and along the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers to support a thriving rural economy dedicated to farms, small businesses, mineral extraction, recreation areas, and private residences. If these private land owners are going to be asked to return these lands and water rights to the public domain, a process should be set up which is fair, expeditious, and easy for them to use. The "preferred alternative" in this case is that any acquisition should be based on a willing-seller willing-buyer transaction. If that is not the case, we do not want to endorse a program that acquires property through regulatory or programmatic takings or forces people to sell out of sheer frustration.

I do not believe that these concerns present insurmountable obstacles. Rather, they represent reasonable, attainable goals which should reflect the way government conducts its business. The Federal California Bay-Delta Environmental Enhancement Act coupled with California Proposition 204 advance a partnership with potential funding of nearly \$1.5 billion. It has the potential to be used to enhance the water quality and environmental resources in the Bay-Delta as well as for other water resource activities in California. Yet, how it is administered will be a test of government's ability to transition to a smarter, more efficient, less coercive mode of operation.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.

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