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Opening Statement
The Honorable Tom McClintock
Ranking Republican

House Water and Power Subcommittee

**Oversight Hearing on “Water Management and Climate Variability: Information Support
at the USGS and Bureau of Reclamation**

October 27, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Today’s hearing is described as an oversight hearing on “water management and climate variability.” That’s an interesting concept, insofar as the only constant in earth’s climatology is change. Just within the brief period of recorded human history, we know of periods when the earth’s climate has been much warmer than it is today and others when it has been much cooler. We know, for example, during the Medieval Warm Period from 900 to 1300 AD, that wine grapes were grown in Northern Britain and Newfoundland and that the temperature in Greenland was warm enough to support a prosperous agricultural economy for nearly five hundred years. We also know that during the Roman Warm Period from 200 to 600 AD, North Africa was wet enough to support bountiful grain production. In the second century AD, Ptolemy recorded year-round precipitation throughout the Mediterranean.

We also know that there were other periods when the earth’s climate was much cooler than it is today. During the Little Ice Age, from 1300 through 1850, the Thames River and New York Harbor regularly froze over. Indeed, during the Little Ice Age, a wave of religious zealotry swept Europe blaming witchcraft for the dramatic climate changes of the era.

Given the constant variability of the earth’s climate, proper water management requires accurate and abundant data, and I certainly applaud any effort to assure that in planning for our future needs we do so with the scientific data necessary to make informed decisions.

I just want to be sure that it is science and not ideology that is driving the effort.

That’s why I get a little nervous watching, for example, how the Secure Water Act was rushed through this house. Without any debate or dialogue or hearings on this side, it was dropped into a 1,216 page omnibus bill that could not even be amended.

Under the guise of the Secure Water Act, the Bureau of Reclamation recently announced a new “River Basin Study Program” that will – quote – “*better define options for future water management* of Western river basins...”

The use of the term, “future water management” has raised concerns by many western water users that this is a program whose purpose is not to produce reliable data but rather to search for ways to justify increasingly Draconian restrictions on water usage. What we need is an open assessment of the most viable, economical and certain options of assuring an abundance of water for the people of these regions from the natural resources that we enjoy.

If the warming trend that began in 1850 and peaked in 1998 resumes, then the need for more dams and aqueducts will become acute. I submitted a series of questions to the Bureau of Reclamation to clarify the intent of these studies and I have yet to receive answers. The Bureau’s silence heightens concerns that this is a solution in search of data to support it rather than a search for data that will illuminate a solution.

Madam Chairwoman, I have mentioned before that the minority party believes that it should be the principal object of the federal government’s water policy to assure abundance. The purpose of data collection and management should serve this objective – and not to justify cutting off water to users, rationing water shortages, or imposing wildly expensive recycling or desalination projects at a time when a renewed commitment to public works would produce a new abundance of clean cheap and abundant water.

And that brings me to the fine point of it. The House Subcommittee on Water and Power can make time for a hearing on water data management, while 40,000 people remain unemployed in the Central Valley of California due to the deliberate diversion of some 200 billion gallons of water by this government.

I must tell the Subcommittee that I’m disappointed that we are not focusing on the plight of these families, or that 500,000 of the most fertile agricultural acres in the entire hemisphere have been fallowed. I know there are some who believe that government can control the weather. There is some skepticism over that point. But no one can question that we can control the pumps in the Delta.

As you know, Madam Chairwoman, I sent a letter to you on Friday asking for a hearing to resolve these matters and hope that the Subcommittee will act on my request. There’s no time to waste on reversing the plight of the San Joaquin Valley because what is happening there can happen anywhere else in the West and is entirely within our power to solve. To ignore their pleas continues to give the impression that this Subcommittee lets the San Joaquin Valley burn while the committee fiddles with lower priority matters like water data management.