



Our View: Central Valley delegation led way on California water bond

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It's not often something happens deserving of the word "monumental," especially when discussing the legislative process. This might be one of those times.

With the Northern San Joaquin Valley delegation playing a pivotal role, and agreeing to trust a governor who is following in the footsteps of his father, an agreement was reached Wednesday on a water bond that could signal a victory in California's legendary water wars.

The Legislature voted to restructure the 2009 water bond measure that will be on November ballot, cutting it from \$11.1 billion to \$7.5 billion but – incredibly – keeping the essential funding for water storage and groundwater improvements without jeopardizing the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

"This is a big deal for future generations," said Sen. Tom Berryhill, R-Twain Harte. "Over the last 10, 20 years we've passed a lot of would-be water measures that never actually had any water in them."

Said Assemblyman Adam Gray: "We've done something we haven't been able to do in four decades – we've put some real water on the table."

Far more important to our region, Gov. Jerry Brown promised to advocate for reasonable, incremental flow increases on the Tuolumne, Merced and Stanislaus rivers instead of the doubling or tripling of flows sought by the State Water Resources Control Board. Nothing is more crucial to the people living in Stanislaus, Merced and southern San Joaquin counties than that commitment. The state has been signaling for more than a year that it would demand unimpaired flows of 40 percent going out to the Delta. Such an increase would cause farmers to dramatically increase groundwater pumping and could even force them to abandon high-value crops such as almonds, walnuts and wine grapes.

But the best part is this: Our legislators acted as a team – showing leadership the rest of the state's politicians would eventually emulate.

"The bipartisanship is the big victory here," said Berryhill. "It was a true team effort and something we're all very proud of."

And they should be.

Kristin Olsen, the Riverbank assemblywoman who will lead the Republican caucus in November, walked literally side-by-side into the Governor's Office with Merced Democrat Gray on Wednesday morning. They made the case for keeping more water on our rivers, and they were united on demands for more money for storage and protections for the Delta.

"We were able to raise the flow issues ... and the impact that would have on groundwater," said Gray. "I think that's the real victory here. And, as Sen. Berryhill said, if not for the bipartisan effort, it wouldn't have worked."

The flow agreement is not part of the water bond, and isn't in writing. But all five Northern San Joaquin legislators – including state Sens. Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres, and Cathleen Galgiani, D-Stockton – believe the governor will keep his word.

"We got a commitment from him that he understands these all work together; he's committed to working with us, and that's the best-case scenario," said Cannella.

Added Olsen, "I believe it was an honest commitment. He will be there as we continue to push the (water) board away from their proposal."

"When the governor gives you his word," said Berryhill, "he has been very good at keeping it."

Galgiani needed to make certain that no bond money would facilitate the governor's twin tunnels proposal. Central to the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, the tunnels would divert Sacramento River water south before it gets to the Delta. She also got commitments that money designated for levee repairs will be available when needed. "We needed everybody to be on the same page," she said.

All of the local legislators were on the same page, and that was significant.

"This group has a track record of working together on a whole host of issues," Gray said. "Given our geography and the huge impact (the bond will have) on our communities, this allowed us to be leaders in the conversation. Our ability to work together influenced the whole process."

"We fought hand-in-hand," Cannella said.

But the fight isn't over. Getting the bond measure to the ballot is just the first battle. Now, legislators and the governor must help persuade Californians to vote for it so the real work of providing more secure water supplies for everyone can begin.

The legislators have done their part, delivering a bond proposal that will truly help solve the problems and a commitment from the governor that the state won't take substantially more water from our rivers than they have in the past. Now, we've got a bond proposal we can all support.

Read more here: <http://www.modbee.com/opinion/article3169750.html>