

The Mercury News

Editorial: Brown, Feinstein betrayal of the Delta is unacceptable California must stop effort to hand more control of Delta water to federal government

By Mercury News & East Bay Times Editorial Boards |

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A boat passes Webb Tract as it makes its way through the Sacramento San-Joaquin River Delta near Isleton.
(AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

Shame on Gov. Jerry Brown and U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

Their betrayal of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ignores respected scientists' research, circumvents the state's management of water and could negatively impact California water politics for the next decade. Without a public hearing. Without proper vetting. And possibly without the support of any West Coast senator except Feinstein.

Just as two state agencies are about act to protect the environmental health of the Delta, the governor and California's senior senator are trying to undermine them.

Californians should urge their congressional representatives to oppose this travesty and demand that Brown and Feinstein stop their collusion with the Trump administration to weaken federal water protections.

At issue is the federal WINN (Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation) Act, which was originally designed as a short-term fix to send more Delta water south during California's historic drought. It is scheduled to expire in 2021.

On Friday, Brown announced his support for a seven-year extension of the act, a scheme Feinstein had a hand in crafting along with the Trump administration and Republican House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, D-Bakersfield.

Here's a news flash for Brown and Feinstein. The drought is over. The extension only serves to hand the federal government more power over California water politics. It's the means for Brown and Feinstein to force their will on the state.

The extension is designed as a rider to the federal appropriations bill, so it wouldn't get the committee scrutiny a bill of such magnitude deserves.

Californians' only hope of killing the project at the federal level is for Congress to reject the rider. It's possible. When the WIIN Act became law in 2016, every other West Coast senator opposed it. Killing the extension will be a significant test of Sen. Kamala Harris' environmental commitment and leadership ability.

For Brown, the WIIN Act extension reportedly comes with Trump administration financial support for the Delta twin tunnels.

For Feinstein, the extension is a way to send more water south and to get \$640 million for water storage projects, including environmentally controversial plans for raising Shasta Dam.

The push for sending more water south comes as the state Water Resources Control Board is scheduled to vote Dec. 12 on a plan that would do just the opposite. The board will consider using more of the water from the San Joaquin River for preservation of fish in the Delta.

On Dec. 20, the state Delta Stewardship Council will vote to determine whether the twin-tunnels project complies with the 2009 Delta Reform Act, authored by then-state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto.

The Delta Reform Act established that water supply and ecosystem improvements are co-equal goals that must be met when managing the Delta's fragile environment. It is widely believed that the twin-tunnels project doesn't come close to meeting that mandate.

Six years ago, at Feinstein's urging, one of the world's most prestigious scientific organizations, the National Academy of Sciences, studied the health of the Delta. As Feinstein said, the agency "is the only body whose views will be respected by all the relevant parties as a truly independent voice."

The academy concluded that the best way to preserve the Delta's ecosystem was to send more water, not less, through it and out to San Francisco Bay, rather than shipping the water south.

When it comes to the health of the Delta, we expect the Trump administration to ignore scientific research. But for Brown and Feinstein to do so is unacceptable.

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