



Trump delivers water promise to San Joaquin Valley. That's not how Newsom sees it

*By Carmen George and Brianna Calix
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President Donald Trump, surrounded by area congressmen and farmers, holds up a document he signed that would help deliver water to San Joaquin Valley farmers during an appearance in a hangar at Meadows Field Airport in Bakersfield on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2020. CRAIG KOHLRUSS ckohlruess@fresnobee.com

Thousands of people stood in line at Meadows Field Airport and packed a private hangar for President Donald Trump's visit Wednesday where he said he's fulfilling his promise to deliver much-needed water for San Joaquin Valley farmers.

The president arrived on stage around 3 p.m. to deliver remarks and sign a document from the [Department of the Interior](#) that could allow more water to flow through the Delta to southern regions in California.

"I'm going to be signing a very important piece of legislation that is going to give you a lot of water, a lot of dam, and a lot of everything," the president said in opening remarks.

Just before Trump's announcement, California [Gov. Gavin Newsom](#) signaled the state's opposition to the federal plan.

Trump blasted Newsom, saying the state of California could do what Trump is doing with water policy "with the flick of a hand."

The president added, “It’s an easy word but it’s a complicated word, it’s called water. You have so much water in this state you don’t know what to do with it.”

Trump said he’s proposing billions to rebuild and improve water infrastructure in the Valley. There has been no major water storage built in California in decades, Trump said, resulting in hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland going “bone dry.”

That’s going to change, Trump said: “All the farmland will be green and beautiful.”



Hordes of people wait in line before the security check to get to the hangar at Meadows Field Airport in Bakersfield where President Donald Trump will be speaking on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2020. CRAIG KOHLRUSS ckohlruss@fresnobee.com

Support for California farmers

Wednesday’s visit was clearly a celebration of Valley agriculture. Inside the JACO hangar, a tractor and other farm equipment sat next to the stage, and VIPs including local FFA students sat on a riser behind the stage fronted by fruit packing boxes.

Trump opened his remarks by paying his respects to two Porterville firefighters who died battling a blaze in the city Tuesday night.

Trump was introduced by House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, and joined by Valley Reps. Devin Nunes, R-Tulare, and Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, and Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt.

Trump ended his speech with a love letter to farmers: “America is a nation built by farmers, who work hard to provide for their families, support their neighbors, and draw out God’s abundance from the Earth. You pour out your sweat and soul, you pour out your heart, you really do. You’re incredible people. You work so hard, and you’re smart as hell.”



President Trump supporters wait in a hangar at Meadows Field Airport in Bakersfield where President Donald Trump will be speaking on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2020. CRAIG KOHLRUSS ckohlruus@fresnobee.com

Support from Friant Water Authority

Johnny Amaral, a spokesman for the Friant Water Authority, was among a group of people on the stage positioned behind Trump.

“I’m here because this president has taken a strong interest in California water issues,” Amaral said, “perhaps more so than any of his predecessors in a generation or more. ...I think he and his administration see a unique opportunity to improve how we operate our state and federal water systems.”

Amaral’s public agency operates the 152-mile Friant-Kern Canal that runs from Friant outside Fresno to the Kern River in Bakersfield. Trump referenced the canal in his speech.

“Already my administration is making every effort to finish the review process for the Friant-Kern Canal in less than one year,” Trump said.

Amaral said of that, “Years from now, we could be looking at today as the day that our collective futures – both for fish and people – improved together.”

‘We love the USA’

Outside before noon, twin sisters Ellie Placencia and Esther Flores came to show their support for the president, although they wouldn’t be able to get inside to hear his speech.

“We’re 100% behind Trump and we love the USA – as you can see,” Placencia said, spinning around to show off the American flag draped over her shoulders as a shawl.

Placencia said Trump’s expected water announcement Wednesday is about “food for our country.”

She said Trump’s “not the most polished president” but that he loves America.

Inside, Bakersfield High School sophomores and members of Future Farmers of America reflected on the opportunity to see the president at such a young age. They waited as crowds packed the hangar and music played, such as Queen’s “We are the Champions” and the Backstreet Boys’ “I Want It That Way.”

“It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” said Naliyah Castillo, 16. “It’s a big opportunity.”

Alyssa Kehagias, 15, said she was excited to see the president. “It’s crazy to me,” she said. “It’s cool that he’s coming here to talk because ag is so big for Kern County.”

Local politicians voice support

Former Rep. David Valadao, the Hanford Republican who is running to reclaim his seat from Rep. TJ Cox, D-Fresno, was at the event. He recalled being present in Arizona in 2018 when Trump signed a [water memorandum](#) instructing the Department of Interior to speed up environmental reviews for projects in the West.

“To see this come to fruition is very important,” Valadao said. “I’m excited because it’s something that is going to actually deliver for us in the Central Valley. ...This is something that’s actually going to be beneficial to the Central Valley. It’s going to be beneficial to our communities and our farmers.”

Assemblymember Jim Patterson, R-Fresno, said the federal government’s direction on water policy is in direct contrast to what California and Gov. Gavin Newsom is doing. He called the state’s policies “schizophrenic” and applauded the federal government’s efforts to deliver more water to farmers.

“The contrast is enormous,” he said. “I wish the state government would pay attention to what this federal administration is doing.”

Governor, environmentalists, respond

Just before Trump took the stage in Bakersfield, Newsom announced he plans to file a lawsuit to block the president’s initiative.

“We will file legal action in the coming days to challenge the federal biological opinions to protect highly imperiled fish species close to extinction,” Newsom said in a statement released by his office. “Our goal continues to be to realize enforceable voluntary agreements that provide the best immediate protection for Delta species, reliable and

safe drinking water, and dependable water sources for our farmers for economic prosperity. This is the best path forward to sustain our communities, our environment and our economy.”

Earlier this month, Newsom outlined a [\\$5.2 billion water-sharing agreement](#) that the governor’s team hopes will end tensions between shipping river water to farms and cities and protecting endangered fish species.

Trump said Wednesday that, “The state’s not doing anything to help.”

The [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), an international environmental group with an office in San Francisco, said Trump’s announcement moves forward with “implementing [Endangered Species Act](#) permits (known as biological opinions) that dramatically weaken environmental protections for salmon and other imperiled species in [California’s Bay-Delta Watershed](#).”

“These new rules sacrifice the Bay-Delta and its most endangered species for the financial interests of the President’s political backers and Secretary Bernhardt’s former clients,” the council wrote in a statement. “We will fight for the largest estuary on the West Coast, which sustains hundreds of fish and wildlife and thousands of fishing jobs that depend on a healthy Bay-Delta.

“The Newsom Administration has the tools it needs to protect California from Trump’s latest assault on the environment, and we’re looking forward to working with the Governor to do so.”

California water in the spotlight

It’s been a busy few weeks for California water management in the central San Joaquin Valley.

Trump’s visit to Bakersfield comes a day after a [water forum](#) hosted by Nunes in Tulare with Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt, the nation’s top ranking administrator of federal waterways.

Also this month, two Democratic congressman from Fresno introduced two pieces of [water legislation](#) - the Conveyance Capacity Correction Act, and the Western Water Storage Infrastructure Act. The legislation was described by the congressmen as aiming to repair aging canals and water infrastructure in California that’s been damaged by sinking ground levels – called subsidence, caused by groundwater pumping.

Last month, the state of California took a historic step in requiring [groundwater sustainability](#) plans be filed for the first time by Jan. 31 for [California groundwater basins and subbasins identified as critically overdrafted](#). Eleven of these 21 overdrafted basins are located in the Valley, managed by groundwater sustainability agencies.

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Video links:

<https://www.fresnobee.com/news/california/article240450856.html> President Donald Trump made a visit to Bakersfield on Wednesday to sign an agreement that will provide more northern California water to farmers in the San Joaquin Valley. By Craig Kohlruss

<https://www.fresnobee.com/latest-news/article240440241.html> Although they didn't have tickets to the event, Ellie Placencia and Esther Flores felt strongly enough to come to Meadows Field Airport to witness the arrival of President Donald Trump in Bakersfield, CA. By Craig Kohlruss

<https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/water-and-drought/article240442641.html> Former Congressman David Valadao, R-Hanford, expresses his support on Feb. 19, 2020, for President Donald Trump's plan to help farmers get more water. By Craig Kohlruss

<https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/water-and-drought/article240442501.html> California Assemblyman Jim Patterson gives the scenario on Central Valley water
Assemblyman Jim Patterson, R-Fresno, talks about the struggle between the water agreement President Donald Trump signed Feb. 19, 2020, and the legislation California Gov. Gavin Newsom is supporting.

[Fact check: Trump says California is rationing water. Here's what's really going on](#)

Story link:

<https://www.fresnobee.com/news/politics-government/article240434781.html>