

Opening Statement
The Honorable John Fleming
Chair
House Water, Power and Oceans Subcommittee
Oversight Hearing on
"The 2016 California Water Supply Outlook During the El Niño and Three
Years of Restricted Water Deliveries"
February 24, 2016

Today, the Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans meets to assess California's water supplies in light of ongoing drought and the related water cutbacks while the State has been partially drenched with powerful El Niño storms. Today's hearing not only impacts California but also taxpayers and food consumers nationwide.

Four years of drought have now gone by and Californians are finally getting some rain and snow. But, will there be any difference to those suffering in the San Joaquin Valley and elsewhere? Will a three-inch fish continue to be more important than people?

So far, that answer is yes. Unfortunately, as this chart says, twice the amount of water is flowing out into the ocean compared to last year but even less water is being sent to farms due, in part, to federal endangered species regulations.

To illustrate how sad this situation has become, here is a picture of imported carrots from China being handed out to a food line the San Joaquin Valley, which was one of the most agriculturally productive areas of the world.

In more prosperous times, the people in those food lines helped provide food to all of us. As this chart indicates, California produces over two-thirds of the fruit and nuts in the United States. And yes, it used to produce 83 percent of domestic carrots. The area went from a salad bowl to a dust bowl. This has implications for all of us who shop at grocery stores throughout the Nation.

And, we as a Nation pay for social services for the people who just want jobs and water, not handouts. In fact, three of the five most impoverished counties in the nation are located in the Central Valley of California. The town of Mendota is experiencing **34 percent unemployment** and nearly half of its population lives below the poverty line as a result of water cutbacks.

Most would like to think there's light at the end of this tunnel. But, according to water experts, 500,000 acre feet of water – or 162 billion gallons -- have already been diverted from

southern California during this wet year in the name of the Delta smelt. We will hear today of a very real scenario that these communities could face another year of zero water even in the face of above-normal snowpack.

We have the power to right these wrongs. Sure, Mother Nature can play a role in reversing this situation, but let's face it: Loss of 162 billion gallons of water in two months is a man-made problem deserving of a man-made solution. In the same way that we heard two weeks ago that it was within Congress's power to reduce predation on endangered fish, we have the same power to ensure that farming communities do not become an endangered species.

Today is about marching towards administrative and legislative solutions that help California and the Nation. I look forward to today's hearing and welcome our witnesses.