House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Legislative Hearing: Desalination Development Act
Representative Mike Levin
Thursday, July 25, 2019

Testimony of Rep. Mike Levin (CA-49)

Thank you, Chairman Huffman. I appreciate you holding today's hearing, and I'm particularly pleased that my Desalination Development Act is being considered this morning.

As the Chair knows well, Southern California does not have adequate local water supplies to match its large population and economy. So, our region has historically been reliant on water imported from Northern California and the Colorado River. These imports have been the lifeblood of our region, and they are incredibly important. But with the changing climate and growing populations, we need to maximize our existing water supplies while also becoming more reliant on local water sources.

Water recycling is key for the first piece of that equation. I'm pleased to support Representative Napolitano's Water Recycling Investment and Improvement Act, which has already received a hearing before this subcommittee. As for expanding local water sources, desalination is an important tool in Southern California.

That's why my Desalination Development Act would reauthorize the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, or WIIN Act, desalination grant program at $260 million dollars through 2024. In my district, we have two projects that are set to receive funding under the original authorization for this grant program.

One is the expansion of the Mission Basin Groundwater Purification Facility in Oceanside, which treats local brackish groundwater to provide 15 percent of Oceanside's water supply. The expansion funding under the WIIN Act desalination grant program will help generate nearly 900 additional acre-feet per year.

The second project set to receive funding is the Doheny Ocean Desalination Project, which will produce up to 5,300 acre-feet per year of new, local potable water. The project has been developed the right way, with substantial community engagement. As a result, it will include subsurface slant wells, which are ocean water intakes that better protect marine life because they are located beneath the ocean bed.

During the third panel, the subcommittee will hear from Rick Shintaku [shin-TALK-oo], the General Manager of the South Coast Water District, the district responsible for developing the Doheny project. Rick has 25 years of experience as a civil engineer working on water systems, and his insight into today's legislation will be very valuable.

My bill incorporates much of the cutting-edge technology that the Doheny project is in the process of implementing because I feel that adding funding to the desalination grant program alone isn't enough. We also need to ensure that we are funding projects that maximize efforts to protect coastal ecosystems and minimize greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to providing $260 million dollars, the Desalination Development Act would require that projects funded under the desalination grant program are consistent with relevant state environmental laws, including California's Desalination Amendment. Desalination Amendment requires projects to take an environmentally-responsible approach, and I've structured my legislation so that the most ambitious version of the amendment will apply should the state decide to update it. Additionally, the Desalination Development Act will prioritize funding for projects that maximize renewable energy use and energy efficiency; reduce imported water supplies from threatened ecosystems like those in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta; and for ocean water desalination projects, utilize subsurface intakes and technologies that dispose of brine in the most responsible way possible.

These provisions are key to unlocking the full potential of desalination.

I'd like to thank Chair Grijalva and Chair Huffman for working with me to develop this legislation, and I look forward to continuing to work with committee leadership to advance the bill.

Thank you, I yield back.