

U.S. Representative TJ Cox (CA-21)

OPENING STATEMENT

NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE

JANUARY 28, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock, for convening this hearing today. I welcome the opportunity to comment on H.R. 5347, the Disadvantaged Community Drinking Water Assistance Act, and H.R. 5316, the Move Water Now Act.

H.R. 5347 – Disadvantaged Community Drinking Water Assistance Act

I represent the San Joaquin Valley, home to some of our nation's toughest water challenges. Not least of which is the availability and quality of drinking water for hundreds of small, rural, and economically disadvantaged communities. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, nearly half of the state's failing water systems are located in the San Joaquin Valley. The Disadvantaged Community Drinking Water Assistance Act seeks to fix that.

H.R. 5347 would create a grant program authorizing over \$100 million for projects located in income-qualified communities of less than 60,000 that bring clean drinking water up to federal standards.

Existing programs at USDA have population caps that leave out communities in my district. Take the City of Delano, which has already implemented several water rate increases to pay for contamination remediation. Unfortunately, Delano at over 50,000 people is too large to qualify for USDA rural water programs yet too small to receive priority for other federal programs. Programs at other agencies do not do enough to assist struggling communities in the arid western United States. My bill seeks to close these gaps. Reclamation, as the main water supply agency in the west, is most knowledgeable on western water supply challenges and should have a role in solving them.

Other communities who qualify for rural programs, do not have the resources to hire technical assistants or cover other grant application costs. Still, many small communities that can cobble together funding for a drinking water project still face an inability to pay for the ongoing operations and maintenance. In some cases, the most economical solution

is to combine several small community water systems or connect a small system to a large system to achieve economies of scale. H.R. 5347 recognizes these wide and various challenges by making these solutions eligible for grant funding proposed under this legislation.

We sought input from local community-based organizations who are on the ground assisting disadvantaged communities. One of these organizations, the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment has joined us today to speak to these challenges faced by communities and how our bill seeks to address them.

I also want to recognize Committee members Chairman Huffman and Congressman Jim Costa, and my fellow Valley colleague Josh Harder for their support in cosponsoring this legislation.

H.R. 5316 – Move Water Now Act

The Move Water Now Act, would authorize \$200 million for repairing conveyance facilities impacted by land subsidence and prioritizes facilities that have lost 50 percent of their carrying capacity.

H.R. 5316 authorizes an equivalent amount for the restoration goal of the San Joaquin River Settlement. Rather than heeding calls to increasingly send larger flows down the river channel, this funding would support projects that restore and enhance habitat for salmon without threatening water supply reliability for users of San Joaquin River Water.

The Friant-Kern Canal runs 152 miles from Friant Dam south to the Kern River, delivering surface water supply from the San Joaquin River to the Eastside of the San Joaquin Valley for potable uses and irrigation of over 1 million acres of farmland. Land subsidence impacts have reduced the canal's carrying capacity by 60 percent, with many of the most impacted farms and communities located in my district. This legislation would provide non-reimbursable funding for repairs for critical conveyance facilities like the Friant-Kern.

Restoring carrying capacity along the Friant-Kern Canal will improve surface water deliveries and is important for groundwater recharge efforts. The region has significant groundwater recharge potential, but it can only be fully realized if the infrastructure exists to deliver water when available flows are in the system.

Congress has already demonstrated its support for fixing the canal. In the December funding bill, Congress appropriated \$2.3 for a Friant-Kern Canal feasibility study and for conveyance capacity correction projects. I'd like to thank Congressmen Jim Costa, John Garamendi, and Josh Harder as well as Natural Resources Committee Chair Raul Grijalva for their support in cosponsoring this legislation. I look forward to seeing that Congress and the administration continue to support federal funding for these important facilities.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, thank you for considering both pieces of legislation that would restore critical water conveyance infrastructure and bring clean drinking water to disadvantaged communities in California's Central Valley and the West. I look forward to continuing to work with members of the Committee and with the Bureau of Reclamation on this legislation and I yield back.