

HEARING SCRIPT
Chairman Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4891, H.R. 5316, and H.R. 5347

January 28, 2020

Good morning. I want to welcome everyone here today for our first water hearing of 2020. We're here today to examine legislation that aims to tackle a variety of water management challenges, and I want to commend the bill sponsors for their focus and attention on what are often difficult and thorny issues.

Despite the challenging nature of these issues, I believe it's imperative that we in Congress work to find collaborative, proactive solutions for our nation's water management challenges. That's especially true now, as climate change increasingly threatens our nation's water supply.

To meet the challenges ahead, this Subcommittee will continue its work in 2020 to produce and advance federal water policy that promotes future drought resiliency through forward-thinking, collaborative policy solutions.

Federal water policy doesn't need to be a zero-sum game: instead, we can build on the best ideas from everyone and improve the water supply picture for all stakeholders with water policies that can endure beyond a swing in Congress or a change in administration.

Starting with the bills on today's agenda, in 2020 this Subcommittee will focus on the development of a federal water policy that promotes more resilient water infrastructure and more robust infrastructure investment in surface and groundwater storage, water reuse, desalination, efficiency and conservation.

We'll focus on the need for greater investment in watershed health to benefit and sustain fish, wildlife, and downstream communities.

We will work to advance research and development in the water sector and to expand the use of modern water management tools, data, and technologies.

And we will also work to improve our federal support for the numerous disadvantaged communities facing serious drinking water challenges, particularly in the arid West.

The bills on today's agenda aim to advance many of these objectives, starting first with Representative Cox's H.R. 5347, otherwise known as the Disadvantaged Community Drinking Water Assistance Act. This bill will make new grants available to support projects and activities that will help supply clean drinking water to rural communities facing serious drinking water shortages.

The bill specifically targets aid toward disadvantaged communities in the arid West, many of which have been left behind for years because many existing federal drinking water programs have population caps and narrow eligibility criteria that exclude many of the communities most in need.

Given the unique water supply challenges faced by communities in the arid West, the bill would also have the Bureau of Reclamation administer the drinking water relief program. Reclamation is the main federal water supply agency in the West. It also has decades of experience working to help western communities address difficult drinking water problems – including significant involvement in the development and construction of numerous tribal drinking water projects, work on emergency drought relief projects under the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act, and the administration of Reclamation's rural water projects, which supply reliable drinking water for *some* rural communities across the West.

Far too many communities today lack the resources and support they need, and they've gone without sufficient help and attention from Congress for years. I commend my colleague Mr. Cox for elevating the drinking water issues in his district here in Congress and for making it a major focus of this Committee's work for the first time in a very long time.

Next on the agenda we'll examine another bill from Representative Cox: H.R. 5316, also known as the Move Water Now Act. This bill would authorize \$200 million in federal funding to repair water infrastructure that has been severely damaged by land subsidence. The most obvious candidate for this federal support is the Friant-Kern Canal in California, which is a major feature of the Federal Central Valley Project.

The Friant-Kern Canal has been severely damaged by land subsidence, which has reduced the Canal's ability to carry water by as much as 60 percent in some places. Restoring the Canal's carrying capacity

could improve water supply reliability and facilitate increased groundwater recharge at critically overdrafted groundwater basins in the San Joaquin Valley.

The bill also authorizes equivalent funding to implement the Restoration Goal of the San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement, which is an agreement that successfully brought conservationists, water users, and federal and state agencies together in a collective effort to restore salmon in the San Joaquin River while preserving sustainable agricultural water use. Because the San Joaquin Settlement contemplated possible Friant-Kern Canal repairs to advance the Settlement's Water Management Goal, the legislation therefore authorizes an equivalent amount of federal funding to help advance the second goal of the Settlement – i.e., the Restoration Goal.

Finally on today's agenda we have H.R. 4891, also known as the Western Water Security Act, sponsored by Representative Torres Small of New Mexico. This bill aims to promote water conservation, desalination, and improved water management approaches to benefit both water managers and ecosystems in New Mexico and other western states.

One aspect of the bill is the expansion of the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grant program. This program provides cost-shared grants to upgrade our infrastructure so that less water is wasted from leaks, evaporation, and other inefficiencies.

Among several other provisions, H.R. 4891 also expands several emergency drought relief activities for states and Native American Tribes, supports collaborative water research efforts with New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and Mexico concerning shared water resources, and expands federal support for water desalination projects, particularly *rural* desalination projects – which can help address water shortages across New Mexico and other arid states where inland, brackish water remains a major untapped water source.

I look forward to having a productive conversation today about each of these bills and I will now invite Ranking Member McClintock to say a few words.