

Testimony of Rep. TJ Cox before the House Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development Appropriations

April 9, 2019
10:00 am

I want to thank the House Subcommittee on Energy & Water Development, and Related Agencies for this opportunity to testify as you develop the Energy & Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2020. As the Representative of California's 21st Congressional District, I am here on behalf of the farmers, ranchers, and communities of California's San Joaquin Valley. As you know, my Congressional district is stressed by a lack of water supply reliability, and the work done by this Subcommittee is of critical importance to the future of the San Joaquin Valley. As such, I'll be advocating for a number of different topics that would increase water supply reliability, but I'd like to highlight three of critical importance: (1) I urge the Subcommittee to fully fund the Administration's Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act request of \$134 million, and (2) Reclamation's full request for the Safety of Dams program, which will advance critical safety work for improving the seismic stability of B.F. Sisk Dam, and (3) the US Army Corps of Engineers' WOTS program, in the amount of \$5.5 million.

CA-21 has some of the most severe water needs in the country and faces unique challenges in terms of addressing imbalanced groundwater use resulting from decreased surface water supplies from the Delta. Even today, two years after the worst drought in California's history, there are families in my district that cannot drink the water out of their taps due to water quality issues. As the number one agriculturally productive district in the United States, access to a clean and reliable water supply is the driving force behind our economy, and I am here today to urge the Subcommittee to include sufficient funding to upgrade California's water storage and conveyance system, which will build resilience to the droughts we know will come in our changing climate.

In regard to WIIN, I recently signed on to a bipartisan letter urging funding for projects across the 17 western "Reclamation" states. With increasingly erratic winter storms, uncertain snowpack, and prolonged drought, we need to be able to capture and store more water during wet years for use during dry years. One way we can easily mitigate the detrimental impacts of climate change on the constituents of California's 21st District is by adapting our water systems such that we build resilient water supplies and related infrastructure to meet future needs.

In regard to the US Army Corps of Engineers' WOTS program within Operations and Maintenance, Flood Risk Management account, I recently signed on to a bipartisan letter sponsored by Reps. Costa and Lamalfa to accelerate development of and improve decision-making tools at western reservoirs. Recent scientific advancements have allowed us to increase the forecast accuracy of atmospheric rivers, which delivers much of California's water supply on an annual basis. The increased accuracy of these forecasts should inform the operations of our reservoir system to stretch our water supplies as far as possible without increasing flood risk. The WOTS program helps with that effort.

As established by Sections 4007 and 4009 of Public Law 114-322, resilient water supply is not only a purpose for federal expenditures, but is in fact required without further Congressional approval, and it is in this capacity that I testify before you today.

To date, Congress has enacted funding for storage projects under sections 4007 and 4009 of the WIIN Act within the Bureau of Reclamation's Water and Related Resources account. The WIIN Act established a process for federal funding to be allocated based on Administration recommendations, and a letter was provided to this Committee recommending WIIN Act funding allocations on February 13, 2019

In conclusion, I request the Committee fund (1) the WIIN Act, in the amount of \$134 million, (2) Reclamation's Dam Safety program, and (3) the US Army Corps of Engineers' WOTS program, in the amount of \$5.5 million. The Congress and the Administration should fully support the use of the funds that accrue to the Reclamation Fund for their intended purpose of supporting western water development, including water infrastructure projects that continue conservation to meet our future water, energy and infrastructure needs.