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TO: WESTCAS Membership

FROM: Hicks-Ray Associates

SUBJECT: House Begins Debate on California Drought Bill

Yesterday, Congressman David Valadao's [R:CA] H.R. 2898, the "Western Water and Food Security Act of 2015" reached the floor of the House of Representatives for general debate. This legislation introduced on June 25 and has made a rapid journey through the House Committee process including markup last Thursday in the House Natural Resources Committee. House Republicans view this legislation as an important expression of their position with regard to the role that Federal intrusion plays in the current drought crisis in California.

The Rule associated with H.R. 2898 was debated and passed yesterday afternoon with debate on the actual legislation going on as this update is written. The Rule was adopted by a vote of 244 to 185. The majority consisted of 243 Republicans and a single Democrat, Congressman Jim Costa [D:CA]. This strictly partisan vote is an indication of what today's final vote on the bill is likely to be. Earlier this week the Obama Administration issued a SAP [Statement of Administration Policy] suggesting that the President would veto the bill should it somehow manage to be passed by the Congress.

The difficulty in anything the Congress is trying to accomplish these days, including water policy for the Arid West, is how to achieve something approaching a consensus. The 244 to 183 votes on the Rule accompanying H.R. 2898 is an indication that such a consensus on drought legislation has yet to be forged. Here are four quotes associated with the bill that help to illustrate the challenges that lie ahead:

Congressman David Valadeo

"The dedication of vast quantities of water to protect certain species of fish listed under the ESA is a significant obstacle hindering water delivery in Central and Southern California. H.R 2898 will require federal agencies to use current and reliable data when making regulatory decisions, which in turn will provide more water for communities in need."

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Congresswoman Grace Napolitano

“In this fourth year of drought it is more critical than ever to work in a bi-partisan manner to solve California’s water challenges. Unfortunately, Republicans chose to not consult with California Democrats, water agencies, state agencies, cities, or tribes and rush a bill to the floor that produces no new water and focuses on the Central Valley at the expense of the rest of the state. This drought affects all of us and the Republican water grab would increase pumping to the Central Valley while cutting water deliveries to Southern Californians who have diligently stepped up their conservation efforts to reduce water consumption.”

House Natural Resources Committee Chair Rob Bishop

[Chairman Bishop reacts to the SAP issued by the White House]

“More blind threats and stale political messaging from the White House will not save those suffering in California and the West. The House drought relief packages tackles a range of highly complicated and politically charged issues in a balanced and creative way and is a foundation for political and practical compromise. Unless action is taken, all Americans will suffer from higher food prices caused by exacerbated drought conditions.....These trite statements reveal that the President is fine with the status quo of the extreme environmental left’s war on people, which puts American livelihoods dead last and our economy on the brink of disaster. The people of California and the West will be better off once this President leaves office.”

Excerpt from the White House Statement on Administration Policy on H.R. 2898

[H.R. 2898]”fails to address critical elements of California’s complex water challenges and will if enacted impede an effective and timely response to the continuing drought while providing no additional water to hard hit communities. H.R. 2898 was developed with little input from the public, the Administration, or key stakeholders affected by the drought....the Administration is concerned with Section 401 which establishes deadlines for completing feasibility studies for certain water storage projects. The provision is unnecessary and the dates provided in the bill could prevent the participation of non-Federal partners in certain studies and may inhibit the Administration’s ability to consider a full range of options for addressing these issues.”

QUESTION: How would you, as a WESTCAS member, rate the chance for compromise with regard to drought legislation based on these statements?