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April 13, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar,

In light of your upcoming trip to California, I wanted to express my appreciation for your visit as well as share my views on our state's ongoing water crisis.

Since I was first elected to Congress I have spent a considerable amount of my time and energy trying to address the water challenges in California. In my quest for long-term solutions, I have always been willing to reach across the aisle. A few years ago, I worked closely with Senator Dianne Feinstein to reauthorize the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.

In past drought periods, California has come together and survived by utilizing a variety of conservation and water transfer options. In all times of drought we must make the most of all our options, including conservation, ground and ocean water desalination, conjunctive use, water transfers, and a more reasonable application of Endangered Species Act restrictions. It is worth noting that our current drought is not like other droughts. In addition to suffering from a natural dry spell, California is also suffering from a federally-imposed dry spell.

In December 2007, a federal judge ordered restrictions on water project operations in the Bay-Delta to help protect a threatened fish species, the delta smelt. Combined with the dry conditions, the impact of the federally-imposed pumping restrictions is extraordinary. In total, the federally-imposed water restrictions have resulted in the loss of nearly a third of the water supply that 25 million Californians depend on from the Delta operations. Recent estimates show that in just the past couple of months, more than 250,000 acre-feet of water has been lost to the Pacific Ocean. Absent the federal restrictions, the quarter million acre-feet of water could have been exported to water users throughout the state.

As luck would have it, our water crisis comes during the worst economic downturns in decades. The drought, in many respects, is similar to the sagging economy because there is no certainty as to when it will end. The loss of jobs and the loss of economic opportunities are considerable and widespread. Farm land throughout California's central valley is going fallow while farm workers struggle to find work. Closer to my district in southern California, the lack of a proven water supply has and will continue to diminish economic growth. Therefore, a reliable water supply is critically linked to California's economic recovery and that of the overall U.S. economy. Therefore, the federal government must take on an active role in finding solutions to our state's water supply challenges.

Specifically, I am hopeful that agencies within the Department of Interior, including the Bureau of Reclamation, will direct stimulus funding to short-term projects in California that will increase water supplies and help restore the fisheries in the Bay-Delta region. While all Californians appreciate the water projects you are set to announce in the near future, we all also wish that the stimulus bill had

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dedicated more that just 13 percent of its funding for infrastructure projects. Given this small percentage, it is even more critical that each and every dollar spent in California on water infrastructure be applied to "shovel ready" projects which address the drought this year and/or facilitate through-Delta conveyance.

I also want to strongly encourage the federal regulatory agencies to follow the lead of the California state agencies that have been prioritizing and streamlining the approval of critical water supply and environmental restoration projects.

As you may hear about during your California visit, there are a number of near-term projects that could benefit our state's water supply and resource management. Some examples of promising projects include the 2-Gate Fish Protection Demonstration Project, the Delta Cross Channel Bio-Acoustic Fish Fence, the Jump-Start Habitat Restoration Projects, and the Mark-Select Hatchery Salmon Tagging Program.

Meanwhile, a consensus is forming around the need to manage the Delta with the co-equal objectives of ensuring water supply reliability and environmental sustainability. That growing consensus includes making new conveyance facilities part of a long-term solution for the Delta as well as steps to improve the Delta ecosystem. As California works to implement long-term solutions, the federal government must take a more active and interested role in facilitating key projects.

Recently, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger sent you a letter that made the following request:

> "We need a high-level federal designee to work effectively with state and federal agencies to ensure consistent and coordinated application of the ESA, in a manner that allows flexibility for water supplies while providing sufficient protection for listed species. Failure to coordinate these biological opinions can have dire consequences not just for California farms and businesses, but risks conflicts that can actually put the needs of one listed species at odds with another. I ask that you elevate coordination of the biological opinions to an appropriate Interior designee who can work closely with California representatives on these issues."

I wholeheartedly agree with and support the Governor's request. As the only Californian to serve on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development as well as the Subcommittee on Interior and the Environment, I stand ready to advocate for any resources necessary to support an enhanced level of federal coordination and involvement in addressing California's water supply challenges.

The consequences of inaction and allowing the status quo to continue are far too great and damaging to California's economic outlook. I am confident that aggressive and engaged action by the state and federal water and resource management agencies can have a positive impact.

Again, I appreciate you taking the time to visit our state and look at the impacts of our drought first-hand. When you return to Washington, I believe a bipartisan meeting with interested members from California's Congressional Delegation would be beneficial. I look forward to working with you to help California find real solutions to our water challenges.

Sincerely,

Ken Calvert

KEN CALVERT
Member of Congress

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