

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor
State of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

We write to urgently request for you to make a statewide declaration of emergency for the state of California. It is not a secret that we find ourselves dealing yet again with a major drought. It is imperative we do all we can as elected leaders to ensure our constituents, and the communities they live in, have access to the resources they need during this time, namely water.

On December 1, 2020, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) announced an initial State Water Project (SWP) allocation of 10 percent of requested supplies for the 2021 water year. Almost three months later, it was clear current conditions and the forecast were still not looking good. On February 23, 2021, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) announced the initial 2021 water supply allocations for Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors. The announced allocation amounts for contractors South-of-Delta were alarmingly low at only five percent of their contract supply.

Since that time, things have gotten worse. Only one month later, on March 23, 2021, both DWR and Reclamation made announcements changing the 2021 allocation amounts. DWR decreased the original allocation for the SWP from 10 percent to five percent, while Reclamation put out a statement saying the CVP's South-of-Delta contractors' five percent of their contract supply is, "...not available for delivery until further notice."

The disappointing reallocation announcements are incredibly alarming as this news not only negatively impacts water used for agricultural purposes but also communities that do not have access to clean drinking water. Securing a reliable supply of water continues to be one of the Central Valley's greatest challenges. We must grow our water infrastructure to meet California's growing needs and make significant investments in building new reservoirs and expanding those we already have. With no substantial storms in the forecast, we do not know when this situation will get better. Something needs to be done. A state of emergency declaration would provide flexibility and maximize efficiency as we use our water.

Thankfully, in early March 2021, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack designated 50 California counties as primary natural disaster areas due to the drought. This designation provides relief for farm operators in the form of emergency relief loans, so long as they qualify, for up to eight months after the designation is made. While this action is appreciated and helpful, it is not enough.

You have recently received letters from many California state lawmakers also citing these concerns and requesting the declaration of a state of emergency. We echo their reminders to you that it was the agricultural workforce and industry that stepped up during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic to continue providing food and nutrition to our nation. If the industry does not receive assistance during this trying time, they risk going out of business entirely.

Just last week, on April 8, 2021, the heads of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of the Interior, Secretary Tom Vilsack and Secretary Deb Haaland, released a statement acknowledging the severity of the drought by saying, “The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture recognize the urgency of this crisis and its impacts on farmers, Tribes, and communities, and are committed to an all-hands-on-deck approach that both minimizes the impacts of the drought and develops a long-term plan to facilitate conservation and economic growth...We are also committed to robust and continued engagement with state, local, and Tribal governments to develop longer term measures to respond to climate change and improve water security.”

Conserving water at the individual level is a critical effort but will not by itself be enough to resolve this issue. Some areas in far southern California claim they have sufficient storage to help them through the drought, but those resources will be depleted at some point and will no longer serve as an adequate supply, especially if we see prolonged and severe droughts in the future.

In order for all of us affected by this critical situation to get through it, we need the state government to be willing to help out as well. We cannot rely on the federal government alone. In 2014, during another horrendous drought, Governor Jerry Brown proclaimed a State of Emergency and, among other things, directed officials to assist farmers and communities negatively impacted by the drought. It was an emergency then and it is an emergency now. Please step up to the challenge and provide this designation so our farmers, agriculture workers, and communities can have some certainty and stability in an otherwise tumultuous and scary time.

Thank you for your full consideration of, and attention to, this important matter. We look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,



David G. Valadao
Member of Congress



Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader



Ken Calvert
Member of Congress



Mike Garcia
Member of Congress



Darrell Issa
Member of Congress



Young Kim
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Tom McClintock
Member of Congress



Devin Nunes
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Jay Obernolte
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Michelle Steel
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