LAWMAKERS HOLD HEARINGS ON WATER LEGISLATION

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The hearings will be held Monday (10.26) at the Capitol even though only some of legislation is ready for debate.

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(Sacramento, CA)

State lawmakers will hold hearings next week/Monday (10.26.09) on a long-awaited plan to deal with California's water crisis.

Some of the bills were just released over the weekend.

Lawmakers are in special session. But, as Capital Public Radio's Steve Shadley reports, they have their work cut out for them...

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A three-year drought and California's aging water delivery and storage system have lawmakers scrambling to come up with a solution.

Now, after weeks of private negotiations, legislative leaders are releasing a plan.

Senate Democratic Leader Darrell Steinberg calls it the "single biggest advance" in California water policy in 30 years...

Steinberg: "There will be enough in the package for people to complain about particular parts of it. But, there will be more than enough for people to embrace at the same time..."

But, some lawmakers...from both parties...who represent the water-rich delta region of northern California oppose the plan.

They're worried it doesn't do enough to protect the delta.

Sacramento area Democratic Assemblymember Alyson Huber says people who live in region aren't being heard...

Huber: "I think we should take our time and make sure we have a real solution to the water crisis and not just something that makes it look like something was done when really in the past 30 years we haven't been able to get much done..."

Huber's mailing flyers to residents of her district.

On the cover is a photo showing a huge canal directing water to Los Angeles, raising fears of a potential water grab.

But, there's no need to worry, according to Jeffrey Kightlinger. He's general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California...

Kightlinger: "Our official policy is not to seek more water from the state water project. It is to make what we get more reliable so that we can plan around it..."

Kightlinger says his water board supports building a new tunnel or canal though the delta.

Meantime, some lawmakers are pushing for new dams or reservoirs...

Metropolis: "They're proposing 19th century solutions for a 20th century problem..."

Jim Metropolis is with the Sierra Club. He wants lawmakers to put more emphasis on conservation instead...

Metropolis: "Sadly the legislature cannot pass a law to get more rain to fall in California. And, we certainly don't know what effects climate change will have on rain patterns...on snow pack storage and melt...but we have to keep that in mind..."

Even though bills are finally in print, there's still no full deal.

The sticky issues of dams and a canal and how to pay for it all aren't resolved.

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