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# Legislature's water action comes in dribbles

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**10:00 PM PST on Monday, November 2, 2009**

**By JIM MILLER**
**Sacramento Bureau**

SACRAMENTO - State lawmakers began voting Monday on legislation meant to ease California's perennial water woes, with the fate of key parts of the package still uncertain.

The Senate had approved two bills by late evening, including a $9.99 billion bond measure for the November 2010 ballot that would pay for new dams, repairs to the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta and billions in other projects.

The votes followed a daylong flurry of negotiations and amendments meant to secure enough support among legislators. Voting is expected to continue today.

"We're as close as the Legislature has ever been to a comprehensive statewide solution," said Assemblyman Kevin Jeffries, R-Lake Elsinore, one of the Assembly GOP's water negotiators. "But we really don't know where things are going."

The water package has two main pieces. One group of bills deals with issues such as conservation and improving the tattered delta, through which much of Inland Southern California's water supply flows.

The other part is a November 2010 bond measure to pay for delta improvements, new dams and other projects. The bond approved by the Senate -- including all Inland lawmakers -- could change as it goes through the Assembly, where its prospects are much less certain.

The day divided legislative caucuses along ideological and geographic lines. The legislation also split Inland water districts and other agencies.

Eastern Municipal Water District in Riverside County and the Inland Empire Utility Agency in San Bernardino County are on record supporting the bills, as is the Western Riverside Council of Governments.

But Riverside County's Western Municipal Water District and the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District have not signed on.

John Rossi, Western Municipal's general manager, said he and other district officials continue to worry about parts of the legislation, such as a provision requiring a 20 percent reduction in water use by 2020.

Some public-employee unions complain that debt service on the bonds would divert money from other state services.

But state Sen. Gloria Negrete McLeod, D-Chino, said either the delta gets fixed or federal judges will further

reduce water shipments to protect endangered fish.

Assemblyman Brian Nestande, R-Palm Desert, said he is leery of more borrowing on top of billions in bonds approved in recent years. He said he is fine with the proposed conservation rules and other law changes -- particularly if they ease the way for the construction of a canal to carry water around the delta, a priority for Southern California water agencies.

Inland state Sen. John J. Benoit lobbied fellow Republicans to support the bond.

"This is the closest I've come to building a dam in my lifetime and we need it badly, and a canal, also," he said.