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**The Legislature Hard at Work: 14 Water Bills and Counting**
by Dan Bacher
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California legislators are "hard at work" developing Delta and water policy and bond legislation that will provide a clear pathway to build a peripheral canal and Temperance Flat and Sites reservoirs.

"Coming into Monday, there was a single piece of introduced legislation in the special water session," said Steve Evans, conservation director of Friends of the River. "As of dawn Thursday, there were at least 14 bills. With the Assembly scheduled for check-in tomorrow, there is the possibility of even more bills."

On Thursday, Assemblywoman Alyson Huber, to counteract the bills providing a road map to a peripheral canal and more dams, introduced legislation that would block the construction of a Peripheral Canal unless it was expressly authorized by the Legislature.

"The special-session bill by Assemblywoman Alyson Huber, D-El Dorado Hills, also requires the Legislature's nonpartisan fiscal adviser, the Legislative Analyst, to put together an economic feasibility study of the potential project," according to the Capitol Weekly on October 30.

Here is a brief run-down of the bills, according to Evans.

· SBX7-1 (Steinberg) - Introduced last Friday and the subject of an informational hearing this past Monday, this was the 160-plus page proposal that contained all of the policy elements of the package (Delta governance, water use efficiency, water rights reporting, etc.). It is no longer the Senator's primary policy bill (see SB X7-4).

· SB X7-2 (Cogdill) – This is Senator Cogdill's $9.4 billion bond proposal, introduced on Tuesday. It is currently the "live" bond in the Senate that is the center of negotiations. It was the subject of an informational hearing on Wednesday.

· SB X7-3 (Steinberg) – This is Senator Steinberg's $9.3 billion bond proposal, introduced Tuesday. He is not pursuing this bond as of Thursday, deferring to the Cogdill bond as the platform for negotiations.

· SB X7-4 (Steinberg) – This is Senator Steinberg's active comprehensive policy bill, introduced Wednesday. It contains all the elements of the Delta package, essentially replacing SB X7-1.

· SB X7-5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (Steinberg) – These five bills introduced Wednesday are "spot" bills. They appear to be vessels for individual elements of the policy package if a decision is made to pursue votes on individual pieces of the package rather than as a whole.

· AB X7-1 (Fuller, Jeffries, Nielsen) – This is a Delta policy package proposal from Assembly Republicans introduced on Monday.

· AB X7-2 (Blakeslee) – This is a broader proposal introduced Tuesday to reform the California Environmental Quality Act.

· AB X7- 3, 4 and 5 (Fuller and Berryhill). These are “spot” bills introduced by Assembly Republicans on Wednesday.

"If the Assembly Democratic leadership is to replicate Steinberg’s creation of individual bills for pieces of the broader Delta package, there could soon be five to six more bills on the Assembly side," said Evans. "In addition, a bond proposal on the Assembly side has yet to be introduced. Stay tuned for more."

With the exception of Assemblymember Huber's bill blocking the construction of a peripheral canal, the other bills in the package emerging from the special session appear to be designed to clear the pathway to a peripheral canal and more dams.

For example, Steinberg's SB X7-4 (replacing SBX7-1) does not expressly authorize a Peripheral Canal or new surface storage. However, it does have specific provisions that facilitate construction of new conveyance and storage, including 85304: "The Delta Plan shall promote options for new and improved infrastructure relating to the water conveyance in the Delta, storage systems, and for the operation of both to achieve the coequal goals."

The peripheral canal/tunnel proposal would end up costing from $23 billion to $53.8 billion, according to an analysis done by economist Steven Kasower. How can Steinberg and other legislators support the construction of this enormously expensive and environmentally destructive government boondoggle at a time when budgets for teachers, game wardens, health care for children and state parks are being slashed?

It is any surprise that a a Field Poll released on October 13 found that only 13 percent of the state's registered voters approve of the Legislature's performance? This is the lowest rating since the survey group started measuring opinions of the Legislature in 1983.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's approval rating of 27 percent is also the lowest the Field Poll has recorded for the man who has presided over the unprecedented collapse of Central Valley salmon, Delta smelt, longfin smelt, green sturgeon, striped bass and other fish populations.

If find it amazing that there is anybody who approves of the Legislature's and Governor's performance! Who are these people? What type of alternate reality do they live in?

There are some notable Delta region legislators, including Assemblymember Alyson Huber (D-El Dorado Hills), Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis), Assemblymember Mariko Yamada (D-Davis), Assemblymember Joan Buchanan (D-Alamo) and Senator Mark DeSaulnier (D-Concord), who have vigorously protested plans by the Governor and Legislature to build a peripheral canal. Unfortunately, Steinberg and Assembly Speaker Karen Bass have excluded Delta legislators and communities from the negotiations leading to the development of the Delta/water package.

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, who is collaborating with the Metropolitan Water District, Westlands Water District and other corporate agribusiness interests to build a peripheral canal, is clearly acting against the wishes of his constituents in Sacramento on the Delta's north end. Fortunately, a broad coalition of his constituents and Delta residents have united in a grassroots uprising to stop plans by Steinberg and the Governor to build a canal to increase water exports from the Delta to unsustainable agribusiness and southern California.

Canal proponents claim that building the "improved conveyance" facilities would result in meeting the "coequal goals" of ecosystem restoration and water supply. However, I have repeatedly asked canal advocates in legislative hearings and other meetings to give me one example, in U.S. or world history, where the construction of a big diversion canal has resulted in less water being taken out of a river system. I have also asked them to give me one example, in U.S. or world history, where the construction of a big diversion canal has resulted in a restored or improved ecosystem. None of the canal backers have been able to answer either one of these two questions.

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