

# Reps pick fight with Brown over delta tunnels



**By Cory Golden**

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**SACRAMENTO — Rep. John Garamendi and four of his House colleagues on Thursday ripped the governor’s plan for building twin tunnels to send water around the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to Southern California.**

They said that the \$24.54 billion project, called the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, has ignored regional concerns about the harm it could cause the environment and agriculture.

Under the plan, “the richest lands in this state become an industrial zone of concrete, pumps, reservoirs, tunnels — miles upon miles destroyed so that somebody can steal that water and take it south,” said Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove.

“If there be a fight, then let it be this fight — let it be about maintaining the extraordinary agriculture and economic viability of Northern California,” he added.

The project calls for two 40-foot-wide tunnels that would run 35 miles from Clarksburg to existing state and federal canals near Tracy. It also would restore habitat on 100 square miles of farmland.

Brown contends that the state must act to protect the supply of water for 23 million Californians and millions of acres of farmland. An earthquake, a 100-year storm or rising

sea levels could be disastrous for the state, he has said, with losses of \$100 billion and 40,000 jobs.

Richard Stapler, spokesman for the California Natural Resources Agency, said Thursday that state officials have been in contact with congressional representatives.

“We appreciate their concern,” he said, “but keep in mind that in the past year we’ve dramatically reduced the size, from 15,000 to 9,000 cubic feet per second. We continue to focus on ways to make the project more efficient, both from a monetary standpoint and in the impact to the local communities.

“Keep in mind that this would also be one of the largest habitat restoration plans ever put into place in the U.S.”

Garamendi said the project “will not happen.”

“Let me be very clear: Gov. Jerry Brown, you tried in 1982 to ram a peripheral canal down the throats of Californians and you lost (when voters rejected the Peripheral Canal Act),” Garamendi said. “(If) you continue on this path, you will lose this fight for a very simple reason: You will lead to the destruction of the most important estuarial system on the West Coast of the Western Hemisphere.”

Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Sacramento, noted that 9,000 cfs amounted to three-quarters of the Sacramento River water flowing past the city on Thursday. She called the plan “a disaster for Northern California,” which would receive “no benefits, only massive impacts.”

“Consider that there will be 10 years of construction, 24 hours a day; hundreds of excavated tunnel muck that will be deposited above ground; loss of county transportation route; impacts to drinking water and flood protection; the enormous toll that it would take on the county’s air quality,” she said.

Flanked by local elected officials — including Yolo County Supervisors Jim Provenza and Don Saylor of Davis and Mike McGowan of West Sacramento; and Reps. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena; Jerry McNerney, D-Stockton; and Ami Bera, D-Elk Grove — also voiced opposition to the project.

“Under this plan, the water contractors hold all the cards,” Matsui said. “The state’s plan for the delta not only left us out of the planning process but also the governance process. A project in our own back yard ought to have some representation from the people who have to live with it.”

Garamendi repeated his call for a “comprehensive” plan focused on water conservation, recycling and storage, along with a smaller Delta facility — rather than a project that “simply steals water from the north and delivers it to the south.”

Southern California water districts and Central Valley corporate farms would pay \$14.5 billion for tunnel construction, \$1.5 billion for their operation and \$1 billion in environmental mitigation costs.

“No way can they afford it,” Garamendi said. “The burden is going to be on the taxpayers of California.”

The state and federal governments would pay for nearly \$8 billion for habitat restoration and environmental measures. That includes a water bond proposal approved by the Legislature in 2010 that was postponed because of the recession.

McNerney said Brown had “hijacked” the planning process, dismissing alternatives. He added that he believes the courts ultimately will rule that the project does not meet the standards of the federal Endangered Species Act or Clean Water Act.

Having spent \$200 million over seven years on the plan, the water contractors feel confident the plan will pass muster in the courts, said Stapler, the state spokesman.

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