

# Napolitano -- voters won't support \$11 billion water bond

**Rebecca Kimitch, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 5-12-10**

Although Rep. Grace Napolitano supports an \$11 billion bond intended to remedy the state's water woes, she doesn't think a majority of Californians agree with her.

Napolitano, who is a leader in the water world and heads the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power, said Monday she thinks the water bond going before voters in November will fail.

"They should support it, but I don't think they will," Napolitano, D-Santa Fe Springs, said following an event commemorating Water Awareness Month. "People are very upset with legislators. And since it's (legislators') idea, I don't think (voters) are ready to put out any more money."

Beyond the growing distrust for lawmakers in general, Napolitano said California voters have become particularly wary of Sacramento because of budget maneuvers to remedy the state's multibillion-

dollar budget gaps, including attempts to raid pools of money intended for a particular use.

"Even if they tie it down and say you can't raid it, they are still going to try," Napolitano said. "People are tired of that."

But Jim Earp, co-chairman of the campaign to pass the water bond campaign - called Clean, Reliable Water for California - said it's "way premature" to say how Californians will vote in November, especially because they still have the June primary ahead of them.

And the bond specifies how the money could be spent, he said.

"The Legislature doesn't have much to do with how it gets spent. There is a lot of accountability in it," said Earp, who is also executive director of the California Alliance for Jobs.

The bond includes \$3 billion for new surface reservoirs and groundwater storage, \$1 billion for groundwater cleanup projects, \$1.25 billion for water recycling and conservation projects, \$1.4 billion for water supply reliability projects, \$1.87 billion for conservation and watershed protection, and \$455 million for drought relief.

It also includes \$2.25 billion for restoration of the ecosystem in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River delta, which sits at the center of the state's water system.

Locally, it would bring \$100 million for groundwater cleanup, at least \$50 million for water recycling projects, and \$75 million for the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

Supporters say the package will improve water reliability in the state, which is threatened by drought and ecological concerns at the delta.

"People have to realize we have to start making investments in our infrastructure," said Gabriel Monares, director of resource development for the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority. "Statewide, water infrastructure is 30 years behind where it should be ... The longer you wait, the more expensive it's going to get."

But opponents charge the bond finances unnecessary and environmentally harmful dams, lays the groundwork for a controversial peripheral canal around the delta, subsidizes big agriculture, and is filled with pork. And generally, they say it is an inappropriate burden on the cash-strapped state when cheaper solutions to the water crisis can be found.

"With this water bond, future legislatures will be forced to cut even deeper into bone, sacrificing education, health care and public safety so that we can pay for this flawed water package. In this financial climate, how can anyone advocate for a bond with such devastating consequences?" opponents wrote last month in a letter to delegates of the California Democratic Party Convention.

Regardless of whether the bond passes, water agencies will have to spend millions on infrastructure and conservation programs in the coming years, according to Richard Hansen, general manager of Three Valleys Municipal Water District.

"We need and want a dependable water supply, so that will instead fall on ratepayers," he said.

Napolitano said the yes campaign has done little to convince voters of the bond's merits. Campaign officials agreed, saying they have instead focused on building a coalition of business groups, water agencies, labor unions, agricultural organizations and a handful of environmental organizations in support of the bond.

It will next turn to convincing voters, and that will require money - a challenge in this economy, Monares said. So far the campaign has raised nearly \$1 million.

When they do start getting the message out, Napolitano has some advice.

The effort doesn't need a fancy campaign, she said.

It needs to explain to voters exactly what the money would buy and why California needs the improvements, she said.

"They need to be able to have people not just PR it, but give the truth, talk about what it really does," she said. "How is it going to reach my table?"