

Auburn dam, earthquakes shake canyon decisions

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Congressman Tom McClintock believes an Auburn dam will be built and as the ranking member of the powerful water and power subcommittee he has considerable clout.

“I am still an Auburn dam supporter,” McClintock said during a recent visit with the Journal editorial board. “The only question is whether it will be built before the city of Sacramento is destroyed or after.”

When told that the Foresthill Bridge was undergoing a \$79 million earthquake retrofit and paint job, largely paid for by the federal government, McClintock seemed surprised.

“I would say that’s not a good use of money,” he said.

McClintock explained that the federal highway administration was in charge of bridges, and that money was probably allocated some time ago, before he took office

Spending \$70-million plus on the Foresthill Bridge when there are so many other much more worthy local projects in need of funding is a boondoggle. It’s government waste.

A regional wastewater treatment plant, education funding at every level, health and human services and myriad other causes are sorely needed but city, county, state and federal tax monies are all in separate pockets, even though those tax dollars actually come out of your pockets and ours.

Assuming there is significant earthquake danger in the nearby American River canyon, close to the proposed dam site, how could you build a dam on an earthquake fault?

The feds are betting \$70-million plus on the bridge retrofit that an earthquake is coming.

If a dam were built, would it really withstand an earthquake that is easily strong enough to crumble the current Foresthill Bridge?

That’s like saying the oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico is completely safe and that the nuclear power plants in Japan are in no danger from earthquakes or tsunamis.

History has proven otherwise.

One of the reasons the Foresthill Bridge work costs so much is because painstaking care must be taken to ensure no paint chips or other debris fall into the American River canyon below.

While that makes sense, isn’t this the same under-bridge area where washing machines, refrigerators, old TV’s, newspaper stands, bowling balls and bodies by the dozen are cleaned up?

Protect American River Canyons has utilized the California Highway Patrol helicopter to help remove the tons of debris being thrown off the bridge every year.

A couple of weeks ago, a 21-year-old Citrus Heights man asked bridge workers for directions before leaping to his death.

Yet we cannot let a single chip of paint fall, even though our schools, Interstate 80, our mental health facilities and more are falling apart?

Forgetting for a minute the tens of millions being spent to paint and retrofit the Foresthill Bridge, the Auburn State Recreation Area directly below the 730-foot structure is also facing a funding crisis.

Auburn City Councilman Mike Holmes and McClintock both assured the Journal that funding is in the federal budget to keep the park facilities open through 2012. That's good news.

Never mind that the federal budget hasn't yet passed or that Auburn state park staffing is woefully inadequate as it now stands.

It's still good news that Lake Clementine, Mammoth Bar and the beloved Middle Fork and North Fork areas will remain open, patrolled and funded for another year.

Holmes takes credit for calling a meeting with McClintock last year, bringing in Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery and his brother, Supervisor Jim Holmes and others to lock down federal funding.

Mike Holmes plans to meet with U.S. Sens. Dianne Feinstein's and Barbara Boxer's staffs as well as representatives of McClintock, Doris Matsui, Dan Lungren, the Department of the Interior and more during a trip to Washington, D.C. in early May.

Councilman Mike Holmes is on a money-finding mission that he is paying for himself.

The many bureaucracies involved in the greater Auburn State Recreation Area — the city of Auburn, Placer County, El Dorado County, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, State Parks, Tahoe National Forest, Placer County Water Agency and more seem a little dysfunctional as far as working as a team.

Does anyone have the power to say spending \$79 million on the bridge — which is working fine and there is another route for those afraid of earthquakes — is money washed downriver?

A \$1 billion-plus Auburn dam won't be built anytime soon and the threat of earthquakes isn't keeping anyone we have heard of off the current Foresthill Bridge.

It's time to bring some sanity back to government spending. If the feds want to spend \$70 million in Placer County, let Placer County's myriad elected officials decide where it's really needed. And it's not on a bridge retrofit.