

# Ballot proposal would divert high-speed rail money to water

Juliet Williams, Associated Press, 11-13-15

SACRAMENTO -- Two well-known Republican state lawmakers submitted language Thursday for a ballot initiative that would ask California voters to redirect about \$8 billion in bond money from the state's high-speed rail project to build water storage.

Board of Equalization member George Runner and Sen. Bob Huff of San Dimas, the former Senate minority leader, said they filed language for the initiative with the attorney general's office.

The ballot proposal would also authorize shifting \$2.7 billion in unspent water bond money to water storage construction and amend the state constitution to give drinking water and irrigation priority from California's limited water supply.

"This initiative secures our water future by building long-overdue expansions of existing facilities and new projects to store, deliver and recycle water for our families, farms and businesses," Huff said in a statement.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority did not respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Voters in 2008 approved selling nearly \$10 billion in bonds for the project to link Northern and Southern California by high-speed trains, but many have now soured on it and have questioned whether it will cost the \$68 billion that has been projected. Project leaders have faced criticism for its planned route, engineering proposals and insufficient federal funding dedicated to it.

A March survey by the Public Policy Institute of California found residents were about evenly split on whether they support the rail project.

Whether the initiative actually makes it to the ballot depends on how much money supporters can generate to collect signatures.

Runner said the campaign would have sufficient money to fund a robust signature-gathering campaign. He said the initiative would offer voters a "decision point" on how they want to spend state money.

"To me this is no different than a family trying to decide its own priorities. A lot of times in a family you have conflicting priorities, but you have a limited budget," he said.

A number of other initiatives, from proposals to raise income and sales taxes to legalizing recreational marijuana, are also expected to compete for attention on the November 2016 ballot.