



California State Senator, Third District

Lois Wolk

News

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Republicans block Senate Democrats “no tunnels” water bond

Bill falls short of votes as Republicans demand funding for Delta tunnels

SACRAMENTO— The State Senate’s Democrats yesterday all lined up in support of a new water bond authored by State Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis), but the measure, SB 848, failed to gain the required two-thirds vote due to Republican opposition and demands that the measure include more funding to enable the construction of two tunnels underneath the Delta to divert water to farming interests in the Southern San Joaquin Valley.

“Yesterday’s vote was a missed opportunity,” said Senator Wolk. “It was especially disappointing to see my Republican colleagues from Northern California tie their horses to the Delta Tunnels and support the current bond written in 2009 rather than the tunnel neutral approach in SB 848 that was before them. The 2009 bond promotes the tunnels and is doomed to be rejected by the voters. We are in a drought. The voters want real solutions, not the tunnels. There is no better time than now to act. SB 848 includes water solutions for every region of the state that reflect local needs and priorities. This bond doesn’t hurt any region and, critically, it avoids investments in controversial projects like the Delta Tunnels that will result in opposition at the ballot. SB 848 is the only proposal that doesn’t provoke a North-South water war and meets Republican core demand for surface storage.”

Senate leader Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) and other Senators from all parts of California bond spoke in support the bill to enhance water supply reliability in every region of the state.

“This isn’t a loss. This is not the end of the debate,” said Senator Steinberg. “This is the beginning of what I hope will be the final stages of a successful negotiation to put an amended water bond on the ballot in 2014, pass it with North and South, East and West together. Let us be clear, there are two tests that must be met for a water bond to pass. It must first pass the legislature with a two-third’s vote, and secondly, whatever comes out of the legislature must pass muster with the voters. Here’s the takeaway: A bond which stokes a North-South water fight will not pass. A bond that is perceived as furthering the tunnels will not pass. The Wolk bond is tunnel neutral, and can pass with the voters. Governing is a matter of choices. We don’t have the choice of doing nothing.”

SB 848 includes \$10.5 billion in funding for a broad range of projects to address California’s critical water needs. The bill is co-authored by Senator Steinberg, Senate President pro Tem-elect Senator Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles), Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley), Ben Hueso, (D-San Diego), and Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills), as well as Assemblywoman Susan A. Bonilla (D-

Concord) and Assemblymember Jim Frazier (D–Oakley), and would replace the \$11.1 billion bond written in 2009 and now on this November’s statewide ballot.

Wolk continued her criticism of the opposition. “Some of the loudest opponents to SB 848 say they would like more money for the Delta, but they want to it controlled by those outside the Delta, without giving the Delta communities a place at the table. That creates a North-South water war,” said Wolk. “Unfortunately, supporters of the Delta Tunnels plan are using their substantial power to stop a responsible bond in order to get more taxpayer funding for themselves. I am especially disappointed in my Republican colleagues who voted to oppose SB 848 even after it was amended at their request to include \$3 billion in surface storage funding — the only request they made to support this water bond. I now regret granting their request.”

“Local officials see this much differently. Today, rural Central Valley Republican supervisors Allen Ishida from Tulare County and Larry Ruhstaller from San Joaquin County, in an opinion piece in the Visalia Times-Delta, recognized that Republican Senators voted against the interest of their own constituents by opposing SB 848, but will have a chance to reconsider their vote.”

According to the supervisors, “Current bond proposals other than SB 848 are unacceptable because they attempt to underwrite the controversial peripheral tunnels — which can only lead to another North versus South fight. SB 848 is the only water bond proposal that won’t lead to another civil war over California’s water. Increasingly, a growing number of local elected officials statewide have come together to find common ground on a comprehensive solution to address California’s water needs. It’s no secret that folks from the Delta would oppose a water bond that includes funding for a massive tunnel project which economists estimate would cost taxpayers \$67 billion and would plow through their own backyard. But their concerns over its outrageous cost and lack of funding for water storage and reuse have others taking notice. Now we are seeing that same sentiment being echoed across diverse parts of California that don’t always see eye-to-eye when it comes to water issues.” Read their full piece here:

<http://www.visaliatimesdelta.com/story/opinion/editorials/2014/06/24/get-us-water-projects-need/11299121/>

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