

\$11 bil. water bond may be too much for voters

By Jim Christie, Reuters

Concerned about voter angst over California's finances, lawmakers say they may need to overhaul a ballot measure that would provide \$11.1 billion for a slew of long-awaited water projects.

Lawmakers from both parties say the water projects are urgently needed, but the proposed bond measure's price tag may make it a non-starter with voters at a time when the state is facing ongoing budget woes.

California is prone to drought, and the state's aging system of reservoirs and aqueducts that distributes water to both urban and agricultural users needs a number of upgrades.

But voters outside of the state's agricultural centers are not particularly concerned about water, and lawmakers sense they may reject a massive bond that would add to the state's debt burden.

California already devotes 7.8 percent of its general fund to debt service, according to the state treasurer's office. Any further increase in the debt burden would put added pressure on schools, universities and other public services that have already seen their budgets slashed dramatically.

"There's a growing concern that a water bond of this size is a very tough sell," said Joe Simitian, a Democratic state Senator.

Republican Assemblyman Kevin Jeffries agrees: "Now we have a water bond that is so large that I think it's going to be very difficult for the public to support it."

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