

McClintock behind secretive California water deal

By Michael Doyle, Sacramento Bee

Controlling California water can seem like a covert affair on Capitol Hill. If you're not in the club, you're left in the dark.

Republican lawmakers, led by Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, have been quietly overseeing the rewrite of a huge California water bill since last summer. The bill could shape everything from the San Joaquin River to Sacramento Valley water deliveries. Despite the broad-based impact, Democrats feel shut out.



Tom McClintock

"I don't think they have any interest in talking to us," said Democratic Rep. Mike Thompson of St. Helena, adding that he has had "no contact" from Republicans writing the water bill.

Equally frustrated at what he described as his aides being "blown off," Rep. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, confronted McClintock at a recent committee hearing.

"He said, when the bill is ready, he'll let us know," Garamendi said. "I think it's a very bad way to do legislation, especially legislation that's so sensitive."

McClintock, who represents Lake Tahoe in Congress, declined

repeated requests to discuss the bill over the course of a week. His communications director, Jennifer Cressy, said in an email Thursday that “when proponents have a draft ready to propose, the bill will be ready for public discussion.”

The original bill introduced last May covers a lot of turf. It stops a San Joaquin River restoration program, restores longer irrigation contracts and limits environmental protections in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Skeptics fear the bill as originally written could also steer more water south of the Delta, away from users north of the Delta.

The bill’s chief author, Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, said Thursday that the bill is now “in good shape” and needs only scheduling with the committee.

“We’re trying to fix 30 years of malfeasance by the left,” Nunes said, “and it takes a lot of time to get it right.”

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