

House passes water bill favoring California farmers

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy

WASHINGTON – The House on Wednesday approved an ambitious California water bill that favors farmers, splits the state and pressures the U.S. Senate.

In a highly partisan vote, the Republican-controlled House approved the legislation that would lengthen irrigation contracts, override state law and boost deliveries to farms south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Most dramatically, the bill replaces one San Joaquin River restoration plan with something far less ambitious.

“Flushing water into San Francisco Bay is not helping to recover species, and people are suffering needlessly,” said bill author Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, adding later that his bill “gives (water) reliability, not only to farms but to the environment.”

Approved 246-175, the bill marked one of the few times the full House has confronted California’s water woes. The nearly five-hour debate, though, also underscored how the bill has magnified rather than ameliorated regional and personal differences.

“This is a power grab,” said Rep. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove. “It’s a water grab, and it’s an imposition of the federal government over the state.”

The bill faces an uncertain future. Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer both oppose the legislation, as does the Brown administration in Sacramento, and the Obama administration has threatened a presidential veto.

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