

Calif. water bill barely floating in Congress

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON – Secret California water bill negotiations have a “55 percent to 60 percent chance” of success during the fast-fading 113th Congress, Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer said Thursday.

In her first extended public comments on the closely held water talks, Boxer voiced cautious optimism even as she criticized House Republicans for trying to exclude Northern California Democrats.

“I’m very hopeful,” Boxer told reporters. “I would say the discussions are going well.”

Some negotiators convened as recently as Sunday in an effort to narrow remaining differences, Boxer revealed. Like everyone else involved in the ongoing negotiations, she carefully avoided discussing any specifics and declined to identify what the major sticking points might be.

But with so little time remaining, Boxer could find herself holding the key card in what she described as “pretty good, often intense” negotiations.

The negotiators are trying to resolve significant differences between House and Senate bills that respond to California’s drought. The GOP-controlled House passed a far-reaching bill in February. It would roll back a landmark 1992 law that directed more water to protect the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, remove wild-and-scenic protections from a half mile of the Merced River and authorize new water storage projects, among other provisions.

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