



California Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer

If you thought California was immune to the season of political craziness, think again. California Democrats Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer were elected to the Senate together in 1992. They are usually on the same side, but not always.

Water is one of the issues on which they often part company. Feinstein is a water hawk who favors robust deliveries to Central Valley agriculture. Boxer, who will retire from the Senate at the end of this session, is an environmentalist who seeks to protect endangered species as well as commercial fishing interests.

Their latest spat comes over an attempt by Feinstein and Bakersfield Congressman (and House Majority Leader) Kevin McCarthy to hijack a bill intended to provide funding for federal water project operations as well as aid to Flint, Michigan, hit hard by [lead contamination in its drinking water](#). The bill has been considered must-pass legislation, one of the last things the Senate needs to do before adjourning for the year. But after McCarthy slipped some 90 pages of “compromise” amendments into the [House version of the bill](#), closely tracking [a bill Feinstein had proposed earlier](#) this year, Boxer has [vowed to “play hardball”](#) to block it.

And well she should. The McCarthy / Feinstein provisions are absurdly prescriptive; rather than leave to the expert federal agencies the question of how the Central Valley Project can be operated consistent with environmental protection, they would mandate that Project operators bend over backward to favor irrigators over the environment. The authors have tried to make it appear that their language does not override the Endangered Species Act, but at a minimum it introduces confusion about the ESA's application. Furthermore, it seeks to reduce the need for documentation (read "evidence") supporting water delivery decisions.

Boxer is right to oppose this end-run around both environmental protections and a deliberative legislative process. Thirteen House California Democrats have written to the Council on Environmental Quality to express their "strong opposition" to the proposal (you can see the letter [here](#) if you have a subscription to E&E News). I urge my own congressman, John Garamendi, to join them.