

SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN PRESS RELEASE

Feinstein, Padilla Introduce Bill to Provide Clean Drinking Water to Disadvantaged Communities

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Washington—Senators Dianne Feinstein and Alex Padilla (both D-Calif.) today introduced the Restore Aging Infrastructure Now Act, or RAIN Act, which would invest in aging canals and other drinking water and irrigation facilities to provide environmental benefits and improve drinking water supplies for disadvantaged California communities.

“Given the inevitability of increasingly severe and lengthy droughts as the West’s climate changes, maintaining and modernizing our water infrastructure is extremely important,” Senator Feinstein said. “Our bill would incentives collaboration and investment in projects that bring agricultural, environmental and urban interests together to address the very serious challenge of providing a reliable water supply for all, including disadvantaged communities.”

“Over 1 million Californians are without reliable access to safe and affordable drinking water -- a burden that disproportionately falls on disadvantaged communities,” Senator Padilla said. “As we repair and rebuild our aging infrastructure, this legislation would ensure that we are making the necessary investments to shore up our critical water supply and address the needs of communities that have long been neglected.”

The RAIN Act would authorize the Bureau of Reclamation to upgrade its aging canals and other facilities when they are repaired to serve multiple purposes, including environmental benefits and drinking water for disadvantaged communities. For the first time, Reclamation would be authorized to provide grant funding rather than loans for Reclamation facility upgrades that provide drinking water for disadvantaged communities. The bill would also incentivize agricultural and municipal irrigation districts to participate in these projects to add environmental and disadvantaged community benefits to these upgraded facilities by giving them a 15 percent discount on what they owe for repairing the facilities.

The RAIN Act’s provisions could make use of \$3.2 billion appropriated from last year’s bipartisan infrastructure law. In California, this could be particularly helpful to repair damage to the Friant-Kern Canal, Delta-Mendota Canal and federally owned portion of the California Aqueduct. These canals have lost up to 60 percent of their capacity due to subsidence. Repairing them will improve California’s resilience to drought. Investing in these projects will also allow farmers to capture more runoff from California’s increasingly concentrated winter storms and move the water to overdrafted areas to recharge the local aquifers.

“As we fund canal infrastructure updates in California, we must leverage this opportunity to further promote safe drinking water by working alongside communities who lack it,” said Kyle Jones, policy and legal director, Community Water Center. “Many small, rural towns with contaminated water live just outside these canals. Senator Feinstein’s RAIN Act is a no-brainer to engage these communities

and prioritize projects which increase public benefits including demonstrating improved access to drinking water.”

“Access to safe and affordable drinking water is a top priority for many of our San Joaquin Valley underrepresented communities. Strategic funding of surface water infrastructure near our underrepresented communities will help improve access to this important resource,” said Eddie Ocampo, director of Community Sustainability, Self-Help Enterprises. “Senator Feinstein’s RAIN Act is a great opportunity to promote multi-benefit and collaborative support for much-needed regional conveyance infrastructure.”

“Trout Unlimited’s partnerships to modernize irrigation infrastructure have produced more reliable irrigation water delivery while restoring fish passage in Wyoming, enhancing flows for imperiled salmon and steelhead in Washington’s Yakima River Basin, and improving stream habitat in Idaho, among other successful projects across the West. Trout Unlimited supports the RAIN Act’s approach to encourage modification and modernization of irrigation infrastructure to achieve watershed health and other public benefits,” said Sara Porterfield, Western water policy advisor, Trout Unlimited.

“The RAIN Act is a win-win legislation that allows for public benefits to be added to water infrastructure projects, while at the same time protecting and reducing costs for existing project ratepayers,” said Federico Barajas, executive director, San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority. “I want to thank Senator Feinstein for introducing this legislation, which if enacted, would allow the Water Authority to explore additional options to protect water supply for disadvantaged communities in the service area of our 27-member agencies and enable beneficial partnerships to advance regional water resilience.”