

\$1 billion water spending plan heads to California governor

March 26 2015, byFenit Nirappil



Assemblywoman Shirley Weber, D-San Diego, is congratulated by Assemblyman Richard Bloom, D-Santa Monica after the pair of drought relief measures she carried was approved by the Assembly at the Capitol in Sacramento, Calif., Thursday March 26, 2015. Both bills were approved by the Senate, Wednesday, and were sent to Gov. Jerry Brown who is expected to sign the legislation. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

A plan to pump \$1 billion of water spending into drought-stricken

California cleared the Legislature on Thursday and was sent to Gov. Jerry Brown, who is expected to sign the legislation.

The California Assembly voted unanimously, 74-0, on AB91 a day after the Senate approved bills that would expedite infrastructure spending; offer aid to communities hit hard by dry conditions; and authorize fines for illegal diversions of water that hurt fish.

"The severity of the drought requires us to start now," said Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins, D-San Diego. "Delay for the sake of addressing every single outstanding issue or need would be irresponsible."

The legislation includes \$267 million to be provided in grants to water-recycling projects and programs expanding drinking water supplies in small and poor cities.

More immediate spending includes \$75 million in drought relief to aid communities with dry wells, fish in vanishing streams and other needs.

However, nearly two-thirds of the money, or \$660 million, is slated for flood protection instead of the ongoing drought, now in its fourth year without enough rain or snow to replenish reservoirs.

"These proposals will not solve the drought," said Assemblyman Richard Bloom, D-Santa Monica. "You won't see any of us on this floor hanging 'Mission Accomplished' banners."

Brown has said the flood protection spending is drought-related because climate change increases the risk of sudden storms overwhelming [communities](#), even in dry years.

Lawmakers also face a summer 2016 deadline to allocate the [flood-protection](#) money that came as part of a \$4 billion bond measure

approved by voters a decade ago.

Republicans supported the spending in the water package, but opposed a companion measure that authorized fines up to \$8,000 for illegal diversions of water needed to safeguard fish. They said it gave too much power to state officials.

Democratic legislators said that provision targets water-guzzling marijuana farms that are illegally draining rivers and streams, making drought conditions even worse along the North Coast.

The companion bill, AB92, advanced on a 50 to 27 vote in the Assembly.

Assembly Minority Leader Kristin Olsen called on lawmakers to deal with looming [water](#) shortages by speeding up construction of new dams and reservoir projects.

"It is way past time to move beyond these temporary Band-Aid fixes," Olsen said. "We have to work together to expedite projects that will increase long term supply."

Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon returned to Sacramento to cast his vote on the bills late Wednesday after previously announcing he had a travel conflict.

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