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## **Chairwoman Napolitano Discusses the Western Water Crisis and Need for Collaboration**

Congresswoman Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Chairwoman of the House Water and Power Subcommittee, recently shared her views on the water crisis in California and the need for greater collaboration among Congress, the Administration, the federal agencies, and all the customer and stakeholder groups. A transcript of the March 2, 2009, interview conducted by Kris Polly of Water Strategies, LLC is provided below.

**Kris Polly:** Chairwoman Napolitano, what is your agenda for the Water and Power Subcommittee with regard to the critical water supply situation in California? Do you see such water supply problems as “west-wide” or even national issues?

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** Most definitely. California often faces tough choices well before other states. Take the drought, for example. First of all, in California I think we need to work in tandem with the state agencies and the other water agencies. The Bureau of Reclamation has taken a “hands off” attitude with regard to the Bay Delta. Hopefully, the fact we are now in such a situation where the threat of serious droughts is a constant, we will find ways to work more effectively and more in tandem. I need to hear more directly from our agencies. I do not even hear from our Senate folks directly. We need to be all on the same page so we can move forward on an agenda that is going to help California’s water situation.

**Kris Polly:** Do you think water supply issues are a west-wide problem?

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** Oh, you better believe it. Climate change is hitting the whole United States.

**Kris Polly:** To what extent will the over \$100 million in funding provided in the stimulus package for water recycling projects help California?

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** The stimulus bill contains a \$126 million floor on spending and that will be the beginning, or at least the starting point, for addressing the backlog. The Bureau of Reclamation also needs to recognize they have been mandated by statute

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to conserve and reuse water. They have been reluctant since I have been on this subcommittee and that has to change. That is one of the reasons why Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rogers and myself are requesting a meeting with Secretary Salazar and see if we can't change that mindset and be more proactive in having assistance to those water agencies that are in critical need. Water recycling is helping California a lot right now and can help the rest of the western states facing drought.

**Kris Polly:** What actions would you like to see from the Bureau of Reclamation in California, and the west more broadly, to address water supply problems?

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** I would like to see water agencies work together to influence the Bureau. Maybe have regional conferences to bring in important interest groups like Family Farm Alliance to find out where the priorities should be. Agencies and interest groups can identify those areas most in need of assistance. We need to work together with the Bureau to identify and influence their spending priorities. I am quite eager to meet with them as soon as possible.

As soon as more permanent people are in place, I would like to schedule a hearing to determine for the record what they plan to do and how they plan to do it and when they plan to do it.

**Kris Polly:** I think the west would appreciate such a hearing.

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** Well, so would I. So, I am sure, would the members of the subcommittee and full committee and all the California members.

**Kris Polly:** What role can the various water and Reclamation customer and stakeholder groups in California and the west play to ensure sustainable water supplies? What should they be doing?

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** They should be assessing what their needs are currently. What they have done in the past, and what they need to do now for the future, and determining where they are at in determining if they can be drought-protected. What will it take to get to that point? We need to close the gap between the actions of the Bureau and the water agencies. We have these agencies coming to us with requests for Reclamation funding and other funding for water, but the Bureau's prioritization process

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is a black hole. Of course, I do not totally blame the Bureau. I blame the past Administration for the lack of funding and lack of vision. Because this is something we have been seeing now for a long time. The agencies are calling to us and needing assistance, and they are still in the same old trench. So there has been limited leadership or problem solving vision in the Bureaus and they have been complacent about it. They are letting the regulatory structure dictate its actions and that shouldn't be. They should be doing what they are called to do. They should also be working with Fish and Wildlife and NOAA. Maybe they are and we do not know about it. We just haven't seen the in-depth problem solving necessary to deal with this.

**Kris Polly:** It sounds like you need a briefing from Reclamation.

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** We might request that and I have talked to my staff about holding a joint subcommittee hearing with other subcommittees to see where we can get on the same page and send the right message. Now I am assuming that our new Secretary, who understands water because he comes from Colorado, that he will have an accepting ear, and be sympathetic to other areas that have water issues. It is really a shame that the decline of the Delta has created such an impact for the farmers in northern California, when the Bureau should have stepped in and put in fish screens. If they needed the money, they should have come to us. Because we already had the farmers and the northern California agencies telling us, as well as MWD, about the situation. So that was not something that was new and they just did not act on it.

**Kris Polly:** One final question Madam Chairwoman. Are the customer and stakeholder groups as organized on these issues as you would like them to be?

**Chairwoman Napolitano:** Well, they could be a lot more organized or focused, if you will. I keep telling them, each one of you elected offices to represent you in Washington, DC. You have to keep calling them and educating them and educating the public. Because they need know how critical their partnership is to saving water and conserving, and realizing that we do have a drought, even though there is rain. Water agencies themselves, they are elected, and then they hire a consultant and they assume everything is going to be hunky-dory. Well, it is not. They need to voice directly to the Administration, to the Secretary, to us, and to their elected officials that there is an issue and what that issue entails.