RESOURCES: Feinstein Plans to Offer Emergency Water Amendment

Sen. Dianne Feinstein has announced plans to offer an amendment to increase the water available to Central Valley users in response to the drought devastating the region. The amendment would temporarily ease Endangered Species Act restrictions that limit pumping water to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. It would boost water allocations to Central Valley farmers and water districts to between 38%-40% of their normal allocations from the Central Valley Project for the next two years. Last year’s water deliveries were only about 10 percent of allocations, and hundreds of thousands of acres of land have been left idle for lack of water.

The amendment’s language has not been finalized, but it may include a section rewriting biological opinions that control California water allocations and protect delta smelt and salmon. Aid to salmon fishermen may also be included. Feinstein indicated that she would try and have the amendment added to the jobs bill that the Senate is expected to take up the week of February 22, 2010.

Feinstein’s plans have drawn criticism from some California representatives, including Rep. George Miller (Martinez), who argue that the amendment would further harm the already decimated salmon population, and cause job losses among salmon fishermen and local economies. In 2002, the Sacramento River's Chinook salmon population was 750,000. By last year, it had fallen to 40,000.

EDUCATION: Science & Tech Subcommittee Examines Ways to Improve Undergraduate and Graduate STEM Education

On, February 4, 2010, the House Science and Technology Committee's Research and Science Education Subcommittee held a hearing to examine the current state of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education in U.S. colleges and universities.

Witnesses included: Dr. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Acting Assistant Director, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, National Science Foundation; Mr. Rick Stephens, Senior Vice President, Human Resources and Administration, The Boeing Company; Dr. Noah Finkelstein, Associate Professor of Physics,
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University of Colorado, Boulder; Dr. Karen Klomparens, Dean and Associate Provost for Graduate Education, Michigan State University; and Dr. Robert Mathieu, Professor and Chair of Astronomy and Director of the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL), University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Subcommittee Members and witnesses discussed ways to improve the quality and effectiveness of STEM education for undergraduate and graduate students. Members also examined the National Science Foundation's (NSF) role in supporting reform in undergraduate and graduate STEM education. Overall, Members and witnesses agreed that systemic reform of higher education in the STEM fields will be critical to meeting America's research and workforce needs in the 21st century global economy.

According to NSF's Science and Engineering Indicators 2010 report, although the number of undergraduate students majoring in the science and engineering fields has increased steadily over the past fifteen years, the number of degrees varies widely among fields. For example, there has been a large decrease in bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science and a decrease in master's in engineering degrees. Many experts have suggested that the number of students entering these disciplines already falls short or will soon fall short of meeting workforce demands. In addition to concerns about quantity of students, several reports have highlighted deficiencies in the quality of post-secondary STEM education, and have tied quality back to recruitment and attrition problems.

NSF also supports and invests in STEM education at all levels, including through its support for research on the teaching and learning of STEM. Currently, NSF funds a variety of programs designed to improve the quality and effectiveness of undergraduate and graduate STEM education, ranging from direct support to students for hands-on research opportunities and interdisciplinary training, to institutional grants supporting innovation in STEM learning in the classroom. The Foundation also provides competitive scholarships and fellowships as incentives to increase the total number of students pursuing STEM degrees. As part of the COMPETES reauthorization, the Committee will be reviewing NSF's full portfolio of STEM education and research programs.

Some of the recommendations witnesses provided during the hearing for improving STEM education at the undergraduate and graduate levels are:
- Providing new and current professors training in current pedagogy;
- Updating STEM curricula to incorporate current knowledge about how students really learn STEM; and
- Finding ways to combine disciplinary depth with interdisciplinary training and research opportunities.

For more information on the hearing, as well as on STEM education and the COMPETES Act, please visit the Committee's website at: http://science.house.gov/.

EDUCATION: LAO RECOMMENDS K-14 MANDATE OVERHAUL

On February 2, 2010, the Legislative Analyst's Office released a report outlining proposed changes to K-14 education mandates. According to the LAO, currently, the state requires K-12 and community college districts to perform hundreds of mandated activities, the majority of which provide little benefit to students or teachers. Since the state does not pay for K-14 mandates on a regular
basis, the result is billions in outstanding costs the state must eventually pay. In this report, the LAO recommends comprehensively reforming K-14 mandates such that if a mandate serves a purpose fundamental to the education system, such as protecting student health or providing essential assessment and oversight data, it should be funded. If not, the mandate should be eliminated.

Taken as a whole, the LAO believes that the proposed reform package would relieve school districts and community colleges of performing hundreds of activities that provide little value to students while providing them with adequate and timely compensation for the activities still required of them. In addition, comprehensively reforming mandates would reduce the state's annual obligations by more than $350 million-- funds that could be saved or allocated to districts for higher priorities.

The report can be viewed at: http://www.lao.ca.gov/

REPORT: CUT PRISON SPENDING, SPARE SCHOOLS, CALIFORNIANS SAY IN PPIC SURVEY

In January 2010, the Public Policy Institute of California released its latest statewide survey on Californians and Their Government. The survey was conducted shortly after Governor Schwarzenegger's State of the State speech and the release of his 2010 budget proposal. It includes findings on topics such as: the 2010 elections; the overall mood and outlook for California; perceptions of the state economy and approval ratings of state and federal elected officials; the 2010 California budget, including perceptions of the seriousness of the multibillion-dollar budget deficit and preferred methods for dealing with it; Californians' willingness to pay higher taxes to maintain funding for major state programs; attitudes towards cuts to major state programs; state and local fiscal reforms; perceptions of the state's tax and public pension systems, and knowledge of budget issues.

According to the findings:
- Most Californians would be willing to pay higher taxes to maintain current funding for public schools and most favor spending cuts in prisons and corrections.
- 41 percent favor a mix of spending cuts and tax increases and 37 percent favor mostly spending cuts (9% favor mostly tax increases).
- When asked if they would be willing to pay higher taxes to maintain current funding in K-12 public education: 66 percent said yes, 32 percent said no; Higher education: 50 percent yes, 48 percent no; Health and human services: 50 percent yes, 47 percent no; Prisons and corrections: 11 percent yes, 87 percent no.
- On the issue of long-term reform of the budget process, most (72%) Californians believe that they -- not their leaders -- should make reform decisions at the ballot box.
- A majority (69%) of Californians favors strict limits on the amount that state spending can increase.
- Half (51%) favor lowering the two-thirds legislative vote requirement to pass a state budget.
- Most (84%) say major or minor changes are needed in the state and local tax system, but 53 percent view the system as fair.
- A majority of Californians say the amount of money spent on the public employee pension system is a problem (41% big, 35% somewhat of a problem), and the percentage calling it a big problem has grown 10 points since January 2005.
- Two in three (67%) would favor changing the system for new public employees from defined benefits to one similar to a 401(k) plan.

More information can be found at: http://www.ppic.org/.

REPORT: MOST VIEW CENSUS POSITIVELY, BUT PEW NATIONAL SURVEY IDENTIFIES AGE, EDUCATION, ETHNIC AND PARTISAN GAPS

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press conducted a national survey between January 6-10, 2010 among 1,504 adults reached on cell phones and landlines. This is the first in a series of studies about the public's knowledge of and attitudes toward the 2010 U.S. Census.

According to Pew's findings, as the federal government gears up for its decennial count of the country's population, most Americans think the census is very important and say they will definitely
participate. But acceptance of and enthusiasm for the census are not universal. Certain segments of the population, such as younger people, Hispanics and the less well educated, are not as familiar with the census and are less inclined to participate. In addition, there are partisan differences in opinions about the value of the census, and in personal willingness to participate.

Specific survey findings suggest that
- nine-in-ten Americans describe the census as either very (60%) or somewhat (30%) important for the country, and about eight-in-ten say they will either definitely (58%) or probably (23%) participate;
- 8% describe the census as unimportant for the country, and twice that number says that they either "might or might not" participate (10%) or definitely or probably will not (6%);
- 84% have heard of "the United States Census" without any description, and another 8% recognize it when it is described as the count of all people who live in the United States;
- Most Americans are aware that the census is used to decide how many representatives each state will have in Congress (64%) and how much money communities will get from the government (59%);
- About two-thirds (68%) correctly say that the census is not used to locate illegal immigrants so they can be arrested, although 11% incorrectly believe that it is used for this purpose;
- Only 31% of Americans are aware that participation in the census is required by law, while nearly half (46%) believe that it is not required, and 23% say they don't know.

The full survey can be found at: http://people-press.org/.

REPORT: PEW HISPANIC CENTER RELEASES STATISTICAL PROFILES ON LATINOS, FOREIGN-BORN

The Pew Hispanic Center released updated statistical profiles of the Latino and foreign-born populations in the U.S. in January 2010. Derived from the 2008 American Community Survey, these profiles feature downloadable data on detailed characteristics of the Latino and foreign-born populations at the national level.

This statistical profile of the foreign-born population is based on Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Census Bureau's 2008 American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is the largest household survey in the United States, with a sample of about 3 million addresses. It covers virtually the same topics as those on the long form of the decennial census. The ACS is designed to provide estimates of the size and characteristics of the resident population, which includes persons living in households and, for the first time, persons living in group quarters.

For more information, visit: http://pewhispanic.org/.

EDUCATION: LAO EXPLORES HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATION, RECOMMENDS SYSTEMWIDE APPROACH TO PLANNING AND COORDINATION

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, California's approach to coordination of the state's higher education system over the past 50 years has been indirect, resting mostly on well-defined missions and eligibility pools to guide the development of higher education institutions. A report released by the LAO in January, The Master Plan at 50: Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts - Coordinating Higher Education in California, examines the need for a system-wide approach to planning and coordination of California's system of higher education, and proposes strategies for improvement.

The LAO pointed to the decline in the effectiveness of coordination as resulting in suboptimal outcomes for the state. For example:
- Public universities have expanded programs that are not high priorities for the state while restricting undergraduate enrollment.
- Students experience ongoing difficulties transferring from two-year to four-year colleges.
- There is increased duplication of programs across segments, and evidence of growing institutional, local, and regional political influence at the expense of statewide planning.

LAO recommendations in the report include:
- aligning the performance of the state's higher education system with the state's needs by adopting a clear public agenda for higher education, with specific statewide goals that can serve as the framework for an accountability system designed to align higher education performance with the state's needs
- strengthen several critical mechanisms of coordination, including funding formulas, delineated missions, eligibility standards and enrollment pools for each segment, articulation and transfer mechanisms, approval processes for new programs and sites, and accountability mechanisms
- reform the California Postsecondary Education Commission or replace it with a new coordinating body to help create higher education policy leadership for California.

More information can be found at: [http://www.lao.ca.gov/](http://www.lao.ca.gov/).

**Briefings: USC To Brief Delegation on Issues Involving Charter Schools**

As part of its Centennial Congressional Policy Briefing Series, the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education will host a congressional briefing on February 26, 2010 entitled *Who’s Taking Responsibility for Charter Schools?*. The briefing will be held from 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. in Room 121 Cannon House Office Building.

Charter school authorizers are the gatekeepers of quality, with the responsibility to decide which charter schools are approved, how they will be monitored and overseen, and which schools will be renewed or revoked. However, state policies vary on which organizations can serve as authorizers, ranging from local school boards and state departments of education to special authorizing boards and public universities. The briefing will address current problems and best practices in charter school authorizing, and how federal policies can strengthen the quality and performance of charters.

Panelists are:
- Priscilla Wohlstetter – Diane and MacDonald Becket Professor in Educational Policy & Director of the Center on Educational Governance at the USC Rossier School of Education
- Nelson Smith – President and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
- Jonas S. Chartock – Executive Director of the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute
- Nina Gilbert – Founder and Director of Ivy Preparatory Academy in Atlanta, GA.

Please RSVP to Jean Brodeur at 202-824-5860 or [brodeur@usc.edu](mailto:brodeur@usc.edu).